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BOTH DICK AND JOB WERE FORCED TO LAUGH AT THE DUCKY'S ANTICS. THE DANGER DUCKS WERE A SUCCESS.

OR,

The OWLS OF OREGON.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF THE "DEADWOOD DICK," "DENVER
DOLL," "SIERRA SAM," "ROSEBUD ROB,"
AND "DEADWOOD DICK, JUNIOR,"
NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DEADWOOD DICK, JR., AND THE WAIF.

THREE men sat grouped about a glowing camp-fire, one night, in early but pleasant springtime.

The fire had been kindled more for its cheerful illumination than for heat. For it is of Southern Oregon we write, and the spring had been early in opening.

Flowers were already in bloom, and all nature had put on her mantle of green.

The location of the camp was in a little valley

threaded by a stream, and where grass was plenty.

Not a day's ride distant, westward, were the famous lava-beds, where little vegetation grows; hence our little party had located to the best advantage possible.

The three men were certainly very unlike in personal appearance.

Most noticeable of the party was a handsome, dashing young fellow, not yet far advanced in the twenties, with brown hair and eyes, a smooth, pleasant face, a wiry muscular figure.

Deadwood Dick, Jr., was the "handle" he claimed; a name well-known throughout every Territory and State of the far West, as belonging to one of the shrewdest, most fearless detectives of this generation.

Near him sat an old, tall, slim and cadaverous individual, with, however, an intelligent face, sharp eyes, and straggling gray hair and beard.

Job Johnson was a quite well-known character, who had roughed it many a year on the frontier, and had the scars of many a battle to prove it.

Job's distinctive peculiarity was a fondness for telling most improbable yarns.

The third individual was a man of sable hue—about the homeliest, most ludicrous specimen of his race one could hope to see, from the fact that he was as black as the ace of spades, and had a thick-lipped mouth that stretched seemingly from ear to ear.

While Deadwood Dick and Old Job were attired in frontier style, the colored brother, who rejoiced in the name of Nicodemus Noodle, sported a loud checkered pair of pants, a seedy, full-dress coat, and a dilapidated plug hat.

The trio were well-armed, and otherwise well-equipped.

"Well, boys, I think if nothing particular turns up betwixt now and sunrise, we'll take the back trail," Deadwood Dick was saying. "Twixt you and me and the camp-fire, I don't believe the murderer came this way at all, and, as the Salem authorities wouldn't offer over two hundred dollars for his apprehension, blame me if I feel like spending any more time scouting around the Territory trying to run him down. The chances are he's fled the country, anyhow!"

"Dunno but mebbe you're right!" Old Job assented, ejecting a mouthful of tobacco-juice into the camp-fire; "but, yer can't most always sometimes tell. Neow, thar's once upon er time when I tuck a contract ter run down a criminal. I s'arched high an' low fer him nigh onter ten years, an' then at last found him a-hidin' up a tree, a-tryin' ter get a bead on me—fact, by buttermilk!"

At this moment Nicodemus rolled over on his blanket, kicked up his heels, and roared a hearty guffaw.

"What ther thunder yer laffin' at, nig?" Old Job, demanded angrily.

"Laffin' at that story, fo' suah!" was the reply. "De ijee ob dat man roostin' up dat tree fo' ten year! Go 'way, chile, dat's nonsense!"

"Bah! you condemned nigger, you wasn't thar, so what d'yer know about it?"

"Deed, sah, I'se glad I wasn't dar. I don't want to roost up a tree for ten years, no, sah!"

"Dry up, boys!" interposed Deadwood Dick, "and quit your noise. I thought I heard a footstep!"

"Yas, yer allus thinkin' yer heerin' suthin', an' et never amount to anything!" grunted Old Job.

Dick did not heed him, however, but arose and stole out of the radius of camp-fire light.

The night was dark, and he was soon out of sight.

Not long to remain, however, for he soon returned, leading and half-supporting a young woman, of apparently about his own age.

Evidently the young woman had seen hard times. Her dress was torn, her rich brown hair disheveled, and there was a cut upon one side of her hatless head, as if inflicted with some blunt instrument.

Except for the wild, scared look of her eyes, which gave her an unnatural appearance, she was a young woman of real beauty of feature, as well as of figure, and evidently was of good birth.

She was faint and exhausted, when Dick led her into his little camp, and he carefully assisted her to a seat upon a firelog.

"Now, lady," he said, "if you will inform us how you come to be wandering so far from any human habitation, perhaps we can be of some assistance to you. We are honest men, and if you have been wronged, as I infer, we will try to look after your enemies in a way they will appreciate."

"You are very kind, sir!" she replied, in a low, faint tone of voice; "but, really, I can tell you nothing until I have rested. I am very weak and exhausted, and if I can lie down for a short time, I shall feel much better."

"Certainly, miss. You shall have my saddle for a pillow, and my blanket to shield you from the night, and I will see that you are not disturbed. But, hadn't I better first dress your wound?"

"No. It is of no account—merely a slight cut. I prefer to rest, first."

Accordingly, Dick placed his saddle at her disposal for a pillow, and covered her over with his blanket. This done he and his two companions withdrew to the further side of the camp-fire, where they could converse in an undertone, without disturbing their guest.

"This is a strange happening," Dick observed, thoughtfully. "After racketing around for three weeks, in this wild region, without an adventure, who comes along but this waif, just the night preceding our departure. I wonder who she can be?"

"That's suthin' we're not likely to find out, until she wakes," replied Job. "Kinder mysterious that a woman should be galavantin' around this wild country like a rabbit on a rampage. Kinder a sp'icious circumstance, it 'pears to me."

"How so?"

"Why, thar may be some gang o' land-pirates in the vicinity, an' this gal's been sent to decoy us inter a trap!"

"Nonsense!" and Dick laughed at the idea. "The girl is no more a decoy than you are. It is my opinion that she is the victim of some villainous plot—mayhap has only just escaped from captivity, and is fleeing for her life."

"Dat's jess my 'pinion too, fo' suah!" put in Nicodemus Noodle. "Mighty curious how c'rect my opinion an' Marse Dick's allers jibes. I done beliebe dat yar gal am a orphan, fleeing from hum to 'scape perskewision!"

"Well, we shall have to control our curiosity until she chooses to tell us about herself," Dick declared, and so the men subsided into silence.

The evening dragged on, until it neared ten o'clock, when Dick advised his companions to lie down and catch some sleep, while he remained on guard duty.

They had scarcely more than done so, however, when all hands except the sleeping girl, were startled by the clatter of approaching hoofs.

Instantly the trio seized their weapons, and prepared to defend themselves, since there was no knowing whether it was friends or foes who approached.

A few minutes later two respectable looking horsemen rode leisurely up to the camp-fire, and without waiting for invitation dismounted. Here, verily, was sublime assurance!

CHAPTER II.

JOHN SMITH'S STRANGE STORY AND THE NIGHT TRAGEDY.

USUALLY, according to camp-fire law, a stranger asks permission to stop over within the gleaming light of the glowing logs or embers; but not so with these strangers.

One of them, who appeared to assume the responsibility of spokesman, simply turned to Deadwood Dick, nodded familiarly, and said:

"Pardon, stranger, but we saw your blaze from up the valley, and allowed we'd like to cook some meat over it, providing you have no objections."

"I observe you did not wait to see whether or no I had any!" Dick replied coolly. "I believe it is customary for strangers to ask permission to share the camp-fire of others."

"So it is, and we beg a thousand pardons for our abrupt entry into your camp; but you see we are so blamed near famished that we did not think to stop on ceremony. If you will allow us your hospitality for the night we will pay you for it."

"I do not keep a hotel," Dick replied, with a faint smile, "but as you appear like honest men, you are welcome to what comforts the camp affords."

"Thank you, sir."

Then the two men turned their attention to the work of unsaddling their horses.

When this was done each returned to the camp-fire, with a hunk of fresh venison spitted on a stick, and proceeded to roast it.

"I suppose you would like to know something about us?" the spokesman for the strangers remarked, good-naturedly. "Well, I don't know

much about my friend, for we only fell in together a couple of hours ago. He seems like a nice fellow, however, and says his name is Victor Howell, and that he is traveling for pleasure.

"As for myself, I have had a remarkable experience. I have been a rolling stone all my life, and have gathered very little moss. My name is plain John Smith, and I can trace my ancestry back to the days of Pocahontas!"

Here Mr. Smith paused to note the effect of this announcement, but must have felt disappointed that his remarks excited no curiosity whatever.

He was a prepossessing man, this Smith, some thirty years of age, with a genial face, light-brown hair, mustache and goatee, and a brawny figure. His attire was rather sportish, and he was well armed.

Howell, on the other hand, was dark-visaged, and, although not exactly homely, was not a man whom one would like to trust very far.

His eyes were as black as diamonds, his mustache black and pointed, and his whole expression rather sinister than otherwise.

Mr. John Smith went on:

"Some months ago I fell in with an Indian named Keech-ah, who told me a strangestory of a lake, some ten miles down this valley. It is a fine little body of water, and bears the name of Lake Sylvan. In this lake is a wooded island of a couple of acres in extent. The lake is very deep, and the water clear.

"According to Keech-ah's story, this island was formerly his home. On it he had built himself a cabin, and dwelt in peace and happiness. The island he declared was really rich in wash gold, and he managed to secure quite a snug little fortune.

"Finally, however, along came a band of outlaws, who styled themselves the Owls, and robbed him of his fortune, and drove him from his island home, bidding him never attempt to return, under the penalty of death.

"He did make frequent attempts, however, but each time was frustrated. The Owls had possession of the island. They were captained by a beautiful maiden, called Lady Sylvan, and invariably, when Keech-ah would craftily attempt to get on the island, he would be met by Lady Sylvan, who always dresses in a robe of flowing white, and he was turned back at the rifle's point.

"The old man's story interested me, and being of a venturesome turn of mind, I resolved to attempt to investigate the matter, so I repaired to the lake.

"It is a most beautiful sheet of water, surrounded by fertile lands, the most of which are owned by a wealthy farmer named Henry Hastings, whose farm-house stands upon the eastern shore.

"Before proceeding to execute my plans, I held an interview with Hastings, who advised me to give up the idea of trying to reach the island. He said that, while he had dwelt on the shore of the lake for a year, and never had been molested, he was aware that the island was inhabited by a band of desperate men, but what they were doing there, or how they subsisted, he did not know. He discredited Keech-ah's story that mineral wealth existed upon the island, characterizing the idea as absurd, and gave it as his opinion that the gang were escaped convicts who were hiding from justice.

"When I expressed my determination to look into the matter, and he saw I was firm in my purpose, he tendered me the hospitality of his home, which I accepted, and found it very pleasant, too. He and his family seemed inclined to do everything in their power to make me comfortable.

"Well, I began operations one night when it was very dark, and I thought I would not be caught. The island being within swimming distance of the shore, I concluded to swim, instead of using a boat.

"Well, I made my attempt, and what do you suppose was the result? Failure, sir, dead failure!

"I had got half-way to the island, when there suddenly appeared before me a boat, manned by four desperate-looking men, and, standing erect in the boat, was a young woman, very beautiful, and clad in a flowing robe of white.

"A powerful light had been suddenly turned on, and fully revealed her and her companions, as it did myself.

"In her grasp she held a beautiful Winchester rifle, and this she leveled directly at me, saying—"Back to land, you dog of a spy, or you're a dead man! I'll spare you, now, if you retreat, but never again seek to reach Mystic Island, or your life will pay the forfeit. Back, I say, to land!"

"There was nothing left for me to do but obey, and so I turned and swam ashore. They followed me until I was a short distance from land, when their light was suppressed and all was intense darkness.

"Well, that was but one of several attempts I made to reach that island, all of which were unsuccessful. At last, however, I eluded their vigilance, and got on the place, but was immediately seized, and imprisoned in a dark cabin. Here I have been kept for a week without food, or water. Last night I was put ashore, presented with a horse, and given a chance of leaving the country or of being lynched, on the spot. Without waiting to debate the matter, you can bet I chose the skedaddle and here I am!"

"I should naturally infer that you would prefer the skedaddle," Dick said. "But have you given up the idea of investigating that island?"

"Single-handed, yes. If I had a few plucky fellows to go with me, I don't know but I'd try the thing over again. I haven't a doubt but that there is treasure upon the island, and if the outlaws could be captured, the plunder would belong to the victor."

"How far do you say this place is from here?"

"Somewhere about ten miles."

"You say the island is *timbered*?"

"Yes—heavily, too."

"How many are there in the Hastings family?"

"Let me see; there's Hastings, himself, his daughter, Lena, who keeps house for him, an old spinster they call Araminta, and three farm hands, and an old Indian, Charley, who does chores. Then, there's a tough customer who occasionally hangs around the place, that they call Bill Bullgard."

Deadwood Dick remained silent a few minutes.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do," he said, finally. "If you want to go back to that lake, and try it over, I'm in with you. I'm an adventurous sort of chap, and when I take hold of a job I most generally come out winner!"

"By jingo, I'll go you. Ef we can score a victory over the outlaws, I haven't a doubt but what we'll be well paid for it!" Smith averred, enthusiastically. "We'll turn in and get some sleep, and get an early start, in the morning."

"Will Mr. Howell accompany us?" Dick inquired, glancing at Smith's companion.

"No, I must move on east, in the morning," Howell replied, promptly.

"One thing I would like to ask you, Mr. Smith," Dick said. "Since you have been in this section, have you ever heard of, or met a man known as Gilbert Golden?"

"No, I have not. Why?"

"Oh! nothing in particular. Didn't know but you might have heard of him. I guess you'd all better turn in, if we intend to get an early start. I'm not sleepy, and will smoke my pipe awhile."

Accordingly, all hands soon after rolled themselves in their blankets, except Deadwood Dick, who remained sitting by the camp-fire, which he occasionally replenished.

"I don't like that Howell's appearance," he mused. "He has the appearance of a thoroughbred black-leg and villain. Then, too, if he were not so dark complexioned, he'd answer to the description of Gilbert Golden, the Salem murderer of his step-mother. I saw him glance toward the sleeping girl, several times. I don't think Smith noticed her. I'll keep awake all night, anyhow, to prevent any mischief from being committed. It's always best to be on the safe side."

When he judged the men were all asleep, the sentinel stole over to where the mysterious young woman lay. By her regular breathing he found that she was sleeping soundly.

"I guess she is likely to sleep 'til morning," was Dick's conclusion. "I hope so, at least. She was evidently pretty well fagged out when she reached camp."

He went back to the camp-fire, and sat down. A strange silence pervaded the night.

Gradually a sense of drowsiness stole over him, which he could not resist, and finally, in spite of his efforts to keep awake, he fell asleep. When he awakened it was broad daylight.

He sprang up with alacrity, and looked about him.

Old Job and Nicodemus were sleeping near each other.

Victor Howell lay a little further away, also still asleep, but John Smith lay close to where the camp-fire had been, with a dagger sticking in his breast—stone dead!

When Dick came to look for the young lady,

he found, to his utter astonishment, that she was not where he had last seen her!

The blanket was there, but the young woman had taken her departure.

CHAPTER III.

WHO KILLED JOHN SMITH?—THE RUNAWAY.

HERE was a startling discovery, to be sure, and for a few moments Dick could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

The young woman gone!

John Smith dead!

What did it mean?

Had the waif awakened, and finding Smith in camp, murdered him as he slept, and then fled? It would seem so, indeed.

And yet, Dick was loth to believe that one who looked so pure and innocent could stoop to commit a foul murder.

Before awakening the sleepers, he made sure that Smith was really dead, and then gave the alarm, which brought all hands to their feet.

"Do any of you know who committed this bloody deed?" Dick demanded, sternly, pointing to Smith's corpse.

All three shook their heads, negatively.

"I allow I don't!" Old Job replied.

"Nor I!" declared Howell. "I am a sound sleeper, and did not awaken after I fell asleep!"

"By golly, you can bet I'm innocent!" protested Nicodemus. "I wouldn't murder no one, for noffin'!"

"Well, I awoke a few minutes ago, and found Smith as you see him. Some one has murdered him, while he slept—a crime most horrible!"

"It is, indeed!" Howell declared, not wincing or losing composure under Dick's keen and searching gaze. "Mr. Smith seemed to me to be a royally good fellow, and it is a shame and an outrage that he should be brutally assassinated. Ah! what has become of the person who was covered up, yonder, with a blanket, last night? A woman, was it not?"

"Yes, it was a woman—a poor, weak, sick, wounded young lady, who had evidently traveled long and far, and was all but dead from exhaustion. She wandered into our camp and wanted to rest, so I gave her my saddle for a pillow, and covered her over with a blanket."

"Where is she now?"

"She evidently took her departure during the night. But, she never committed this crime. It was not in her to do such a thing."

"Were you awake when she took her departure?"

"I was not."

"What was her name?"

"I don't know. She did not give it."

Victor Howell shrugged his shoulders, and smiled significantly.

"Well, there seems to be little doubt but what she did the deed!" the man said, decidedly. "Some one certainly did the job, and the very fact that she sneaked away, when the rest of us were asleep, is criminating in itself."

"No! no! I can't believe it," Dick declared. "I'd sooner suspect any one else than her—even you!"

Howell instantly flushed red with anger.

"Curse you! how dare you insult me with such a vile suspicion?" he cried, hoarsely, reaching toward his hip pocket. "I know nothing of the man, except that we met yesterday afternoon, and rode along together. You'd better have a care in your choice of words!"

"Pah! I'm not scared of you," Dick replied undauntedly, "and you'd better not pull a pop on me, if you don't want to drop. I'm at liberty to suspect whom I please. You've got the cut of a villain, and if I were sure you killed Smith, I'd string you up to the nearest tree."

Howell fairly gnashed his teeth with consuming rage, but he dared not draw a weapon, for old Job Johnson had the drop on him, as did Nicodemus.

"May curses seize you for your impudence!" the man hissed. "I'll have you know that I am a gentleman, and don't come of a family of murderers. In God's name, what reason could I have for killing Smith, whom I never saw before yesterday, as he told you himself? Why, sir, you are mad to think of accusing me! How do you know but what the woman you were harboring was the same one of whom Smith was telling, and that she followed on purpose to put him out of the way?"

Such an idea had evidently occurred to Dick, but he put it aside.

"Well, I don't know about that. One thing is sure—this man has been murdered, and some one did it. I have not sufficient evidence against you, or I should not hesitate to put you under arrest, as I have the power and authority to do.

As it is, I should advise you to make yourself scarce hereabouts, lest I do find criminating proof against you?"

"Thank you," Howell retorted, with sarcasm. "I will go, but from no other reason than my own choice, sir—from no other reason whatever. If I should ever have the good fortune to meet you in the East in future, I will try to return the compliment of your insult to me!"

Then, turning, he stalked away toward where his horse was picketed out to graze.

Deadwood Dick gazed after him with gleaming eyes.

"I've half a mind to arrest the fellow as it is," he muttered, "for I believe he is the murderer, as much as I believe that I'm alive."

"So do I," said Old Job, interpreting his leader's thoughts. "I'd bet my unimpeachable character he's ther murderer."

"An' I feels it in my elbow-joints he's de pusson dat slewed de man."

Howell lost no time in mounting his horse and riding rapidly away.

Deadwood Dick sent a random shot after him, which had the effect of accelerating his speed, and then turned his attention to the remains of John Smith.

"I suppose we'll have to bury the poor fellow here," he said.

"Better search him, and see ef he hain't got something about his person that'll tell whar he belongs," Job suggested.

This Dick at once proceeded to do, but found not a single scrap of paper.

He, however, found a buckskin money-belt, containing two hundred dollars in greenbacks.

As there was nothing else that could be done under the circumstances, the three strangely-mated pards set to work to hollow out a grave for the reception of poor Smith's remains.

When this was done, they securely wrapped the body up in a couple of blankets, and buried it, near where the murder had been done.

They then broke camp, and mounting their horses, rode away from the fateful spot.

Dick headed down the valley, toward where Smith had said lay Sylvan Lake.

"Be yer goin' to tackle that floatin' island job?" Old Job inquired.

"I don't know yet," Dick replied. "I am going as far as the lake, and take a look at things, and draw my conclusions, later. If I think there's any sport or money in the matter, maybe we'll take hold of it."

They rode on, steadily. Their route lay through the heart of the pretty little valley, and traveling was easy.

Their horses were spirited animals, and it did not take them long to cover the ten miles of their journey, and they finally arrived on the banks of the lake.

It proved to be a pretty sheet of water, some two and a half miles in length by two in width, and its shores sloped gently to the water's edge.

Not far from where they halted, stood a pretty farm-house of stone and adobe, with out-buildings of like construction.

The land running back from the lake was largely under cultivation; cattle and sheep were also to be seen grazing upon the slopes.

It was quite a novel sight to see such a cosy little homestead so far from any settlement or abode of civilization—a very encouraging sight, too.

Two teams of horses were to be seen tilling the ground, and other evidences of rural thrift were visible elsewhere.

The island was seen out about the middle of the lake. As viewed by Dick and his companion, it probably contained, as John Smith had stated, a couple of acres.

"Well, here we are," Dick exclaimed, as the trio drew rein at the water's edge, "and yonder is the island. It looks dark and forbidding enough to hold an army of pirates."

"Thet she do," Old Job assented. "An' it looks jes' as if it war afloat on the water, which reminds me of a raai floatin' island I once found on the upper Missouri, an' I tell ye she was a daisy, an' saved my life!"

"Saved yer life?"

"You bet! Ye see et war one winter way ur in Dakote, an' I had bin huntin'. I had the misfortin' to lose my hoss, an' on top o' that come a ten-fut fall o' snow. I war miles from any habitation. Travelin' on foot wer' out o' the question, an' et begun to get so cold that et would freeze the whiskers off your face. I tell you I begun to git mighty scared, wi' death starin' me in the face, an' war beginnin' to think up what scripiter potations I uster know, so's to have 'em ready when wuss come to wuss, when along came one uv them islands, a floatin' "

down the Missouri, as nateral an' life-like as a double-jointed zephyr, in fly-time.

"Smotherin' onions! but warn't I tickled! Sez I: 'Heer's a chance to get out o' ther wilderness,' an' I jest swum out, an' inwited myself to a ride on thet 'ar island, and away we went."

"Well, sir, I rode on thet island cl'ar down to Fort Berthold, a distance o' forty mile, 'thout payin' a continental red, an' when we got opposite the fort, the island switched in to shore, let me off, an' then went on her way ter Bismarck. By cracky, that was an island, now, I tell yer!"

"Holy Moses! what a lie!" groaned Nicodemus. "May de Lord sabe you, sah, fo' a pore sinner! I don' wonder, sab, dat de great Bible Job was kerflicted wid biles if he tol' sech whoppers as dat!"

"Yes, Job, that's a stunner," laughed Dick, "and we'll excuse you from any more of the same kind, for some time to come!"

"Et's a fact, by buttermilk!" Job asserted, with a grim smile.

Just then the clatter of hoofs were heard, and looking around, the trio saw a horse coming at a mad run, and aiming direct for the lake, while, clinging to it, wild with terror, was a young woman.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISIT TO HASTINGS HALL.

THE horse was coming at such speed that nothing short of a stone wall could have stopped it.

Dick saw this, saw that the young lady was in deadly peril, and prepared himself accordingly.

The animal seemed utterly blind, and was aiming straight for the lake. He would pass within a few feet of where the three had halted, and would no doubt plunge into the water, and the lady would be drowned, unless rescued.

On came the maddened animal, swerving neither right or left, and as he swept by, Deadwood Dick yelled to the maiden:

"Throw yourself off, when you strike the water!"

On—on, rushed the horse, and with a mad leap, plunged far out into the water.

The rider evidently had heard Dick's cry, for she followed his instructions by throwing herself from the saddle.

The first horse had scarcely plunged into the lake, when Dick's noble steed followed example, and swam out to where the young woman was struggling in the water.

Dick reached her in a moment, and drew her up before him; then, turning his horse around, rode out of the lake, in triumph.

"Hurrah! bravely done, me boy—couldn't ha' done better myself!" cried Old Job, jubilantly.

"Golly, Marse Dick, you're powerful brave," chimed in Nicodemus.

Dick paid no heed to the remarks of his pards, but turned his attention to the beautiful maiden he held in his arms.

"You've had a narrow escape, miss," he said.

"Yes," she replied, "I feel very weak from this fright. Will you please take me home?"

"To be sure I will. Where do you live?"

"My name is Honora Hastings, and I live at the farm-house yonder."

"Very well, Miss Hastings, I'll have you home in a few minutes!" and bidding Job and Nick remain where they were, he turned his horse toward the farm-house.

The latter was less than a quarter of a mile away, and the young detective soon rode up before the door, just as a heavily-built man rushed forth excitedly.

"Why—why, what is the matter with my child?" he cried; "is she hurt—is she?"

"Oh, no; she only got a little ducking!" Dick reassured the excited father. "Her horse ran away and plunged with her into the lake, and as I was opportunely near at hand, I went in and fished her out."

"You are a noble young man, and you have my hearty thanks. Give me my child, and dismount and come in the house. I shall be only too glad to welcome the savior of my daughter's life."

"I will accept your invitation, sir, as after you have cared for your daughter's wants, I would have a few words in private with you," Dick responded.

Handing Honora to her father he dismounted, and the trio entered the farm-house.

Dick was requested to enter the parlor, while Mr. Hastings supported his daughter up-stairs.

Dick found the parlor to be a cosily-furnished apartment, even for that far-away section of the country, the most of the furnishings being comparatively new.

It was upward of an hour ere Hastings came down-stairs, entered the parlor, and took a seat.

"I trust you will pardon my delay," he said, apologetically, "but I had to see that my daughter was properly cared for."

"Oh! certainly," Dick replied. "I trust your daughter was not injured?"

"Oh, no. She is simply suffering from nervousness, of which she will recover, as soon as she has rest. She bade me convey to you her sincere thanks for rescuing her, and, as for myself, you have my greatest gratitude, and if there is any way I can fittingly reward you, you have but to name it."

"Don't mention such a thing, sir, as I could never think of taking a reward for such a service."

"Well, perhaps I will see a time when I can better express my gratitude than in words. Was the horse drowned, sir?"

"Really, I cannot say, as I came away in such a hurry I did not have time to look. I should presume, however, that it was."

"Most likely. By the way, sir, I believe I do not know your name."

"It is Bristol, sir," and Dick handed him one of his cards, which bore the following inscription:

"RICHARD BRISTOL,

(Deadwood Dick, Jr.),

U. S. Gov't Detective."

"A detective, eh?" Hastings said, manifesting surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"You look young for that line of business."

"Nevertheless, I have followed it for several years."

"Is that what brought you here?"

"Partly. I have come to investigate the report of a gang of outlaws existing on the island, and if I find them, to endeavor to break them up."

"Why, how did you hear about them?"

"From one who tackled the job, and is now dead."

"You don't mean John Smith?"

"The same."

"Why, he stopped with me until a short time ago, and then disappeared."

"So I am aware, sir."

"And you say he is dead?"

"Yes—murdered last night."

"By whom, for God's sake?"

"That I do not know, but hope to find out. He and another man named Victor Howell spent last night in my camp, and Smith told me of the outlaws, and we made up to come on here. We went to sleep, and when the rest of us awoke, Smith was dead, with a dagger sticking in his breast."

"Good heavens, this is terrible! But where was Smith, during the interval of his absence from my house?"

"A prisoner on the island, according to his own statement. He was finally released and warned to leave the country."

"Did you bury him, after you found him dead?"

"We did."

"And so you propose to hunt down these outlaws?"

"I do. I wanted first, before I set to work, to see you, and learn for certain if such a gang really exists."

"Well, yes, I know that there is a party of men quart'ed on the island, but who they are is more than I am able to tell you, as they have never troubled me in the least, and of their comings or goings, I know absolutely nothing."

"But let me tell you one thing. You may be a detective, and shrewd and fearless, but you will never succeed in capturing those fellows. In the first place, you'll have to be mighty sharp to ever set foot on the island, and even if you do succeed in that, you will be instantly pounced upon, and killed or imprisoned. They have a secret they are guarding with precious care, and are constantly on the alert."

"Who is this Lady Sylvan, their girl captain?"

"How should I know? Through Smith, I have heard of her, but no one here, at Hastings Hall, has ever had the good fortune to get a glimpse of her."

"Very strange, is it not?"

"Yes, it's all very strange; and once again, Mr. Bristol, let me advise you as a friend to give up the job, before you begin it, as you will find it most conducive to your good health to avoid that island and its occupants."

"Not by a jugful," Dick unhesitatingly replied.

"I intend to go for the island and its occu-

pants in dead earnest. The harder the job, the more reason for me to do it."

"Oh, well, if you will, go ahead. You'll have to take the consequences of your rashness."

At this juncture a door opened, and a man stepped into the room, but quickly retreated and closed the door, yet not until Dick had got a good look at him. He was none other than Victor Howell, and the discovery caused Dick to utter a surprised ejaculation.

"Why, what is the matter?" queried Hastings.

"Matter!" exclaimed Dick. "Do you allow that man in your house?"

"Sir! why, that is my guest, Mr. Dufrane, from San Francisco!"

"Dufrane fiddlesticks! It's the same man who camped out with me, last night—Victor Howell, whom I suspect of murdering John Smith!"

"Good Heaven! what a mistake! No! no! my young friend—you are greatly mistaken! This is really Mr. Dufrane. Why, he only arrived about an hour ago. You see, several years ago he met my daughter, and now he has come on to see if he can't effect an alliance with her. He is a wealthy wine merchant of Frisco."

"Sorry to say you're the one that's mistaken, Mr. Hastings!" persisted Dick, "but you are. There may be one or a dozen Dufranes, in Frisco, but the man who was about to enter the parlor a few minutes ago, but backed out on seeing me, is the same galoot who passed last night in my camp, ten miles from here, as Victor Howell—the same chap whom I fired out of camp this morning, because I suspected him of Smith's murder!"

Mr. Hastings arose angrily.

"You're the most perverse young man I ever met!" he declared, rising angrily. "To satisfy you that you are wrong, I will call Mr. Dufrane in, personally!"

"Do so!" Dick retorted.

Hastings accordingly stepped to the door, opened it, and called, loudly.

"Mr. Dufrane! Mr. Dufrane! Step this way, please."

"Ay! ay!" answered a voice, and a moment later Howell stepped into the parlor.

His dusky face was perfectly calm, and impassive.

"Mr. Dufrane," said Hastings, pointing to Dick, "that young man claims that last night, under the name of Victor Howell, you spent the night at his camp, some ten miles from here. Is it true?"

"It certainly is not," was the prompt response. "I spent last night at a little tavern some twenty miles south of here."

"Is your name Howell?"

"By no means!"

"It is Dufrane, isn't it?"

"Certainly!" was the positive reply.

"How are you, Dufrane!" cried Dick, in ridicule. "Do you feel any more comfortable under your new alias, than you did as Mr. Victor Howell? Ha! ha! you're a plum-colored pomegranate, you are!"

"Mr. Dufrane, did you ever see this remarkable young man before?" demanded Hastings, pretending not to notice Dick's interruption.

"Never, in my life, sir!" Howell declared, with emphasis.

"Very well. That will do. You may retire."

Howell escaped from the room, in pretty short order, while Hastings turned triumphantly to our hero.

"Well, young man, you see how greatly you were mistaken, don't you?"

"On the contrary, I don't see, at all!" Dick persisted. "That man's name may be Dufrane, but all the same he spent last night in my camp, under the alias of Victor Howell, as my men will testify."

"But, he says he never saw you before!"

"He lies, like a trooper!"

"Sir—rh! this to me in my own house?"

"You heard the fact. He is a clear-cut diamond liar!"

"You are insolent, sir, and must leave my house."

"Certainly, I will! Don't wish you any bad luck, Hastings, but if you get salted for harboring this man, Victor Howell, you'll get your deserts."

The Western prince of detectives left the house, mounted his horse, and rode back where he had left his companions.

"So Howell is here, eh?" he mused, his brows knitting. "I wonder what that signifies? Can it be that Hastings is so green as to let the fellow hang him up for a sucker? No! I don't

believe that. If the fellow's name is Dufrane, then he was under an *alias* last night, and fell in with John Smith, not by mere chance, but for the sole purpose of murdering him. But, what for? How was Smith in his way, I wonder?

"Can it be that Howell is one of the island desperadoes? Such being the case, he would have had a cause for killing Smith. Such being the case, he is not very recently from 'Frisco. Henry Hasting told a whopping lie when he said his guest had just arrived from 'Frisco, to-day. Humph! What was his object in lying? Can it be that he and Howell are in collusion? Can it be that both belong to the Owls, which organization is a blind to cover the existence of a rich gold-mine?

"By cracky! this thing shall be fully investigated, before we leave these parts!"

And deep in reflection, he rode on, to rejoin his companions.

CHAPTER V.

BILL BULLGARD, ESQ.

WHEN Dick arrived at the point where he had left his companions, he found Job and Nicodemus engaged in a game of cards, for a dollar a corner, and the "coon" was getting decidedly the best of the bargain.

"Come, boys, let up on cards, and let's get to work," Dick cried, as he dismounted.

"What doin'?" demanded Job.

"Stakin' camp. We've got enough canvas and blankets between us to make a snug little tent, which we shall need, as we may stay here for some time."

"Tho't we was going to the farm-house to board?" grunted Job.

"Not much. The old man over there is about as hospitable as a hog, and we would be welcomed by buckshot instead of bullets."

After the horses had been tethered out to graze, the work of constructing a tent began. Two uprights and a cross-piece of smooth sapling were procured, to support the covering. Three large pieces of canvas were produced, as a part of the camping outfit. These were spliced, and formed a desirable roof to the tent. Blankets were brought into requisition for the front and rear, and the tent was ready for occupancy.

Cooking utensils were then produced from the packs, and the trio were ready for housekeeping, but the want of one thing, provender, made housekeeping a mere pretense.

The contract for furnishing this essential was awarded to Nicodemus, who had boasted of his skill as a fisher, and of his power to charm poultry from the roost. So, equipped with a pole, hook and line, the sable gent started off along the shores, to try his luck, while Dick and Job sat down with their pipes, to chat and smoke, Dick relating to the veteran in detail his experience at the farm-house.

The old man listened in silence. His was an inscrutable countenance.

"So the skunk got here ahead of us, did he?" he commented. "Pity we didn't yank him up arter the murder."

"You're right. I'm not only of the opinion that he murdered John Smith, but that he is in league with the island gang."

"Shouldn't wonder a bit, boyee—shouldn't wonder a bit! an' seein' that the farmer took his part, et looks mighty likely that he too has got a finger in the pie."

"The same idea has occurred to me. And now that we're here, I've made up my mind to investigate the whole business thoroughly, or bust."

"But, whar ye goin' ter begin?"

"I've not made up my mind yet. In some way we must reach the island. Just how, I don't know, for we have no boat. I must have time to make my plans, and in the mean time, it won't do any harm for us to remain quiet a few days, to study the situation and make observations."

"Yas, I guess ye'r about right thar!"

Within an hour Nicodemus returned with as fine a string of trout and perch as one could desire, some of them being regular beauties.

"Fo' de Lor' sake!" Nick exclaimed, his eyes rolling comically, "dis be de Garding ob Eden fo' fishin'. Bet I could hab cotched free bushel, if I could hab carried 'em. Dis would be jes' de vicinity. Nigger can't lib widout hen-roost, no-how!"

Then that enormous mouth opened wide, and the sable son of the cotton-belt roared with laughter at his own facetiousness.

There was plenty of dry driftwood washed up

along the banks of the lake, and a fire was soon kindled, while Nick set to work preparing a repast, for he was a good cook, as well as a good fisherman.

In a short time the meal was ready, and all hands sat down to it, with keen appetites.

They had just finished the meal, when a man was seen rapidly approaching from the direction of the farm-house, and he was coming with a vengeance, too, for his legs were of more than average length, and his strides far-reaching.

He was of muscular build, with a broad chest, heavy limbs, while his swarthy visage was stamped with ugliness and evil passions.

"That chap evidently means business!" Deadwood Dick remarked. "Stand ready to blow him up, boys, if he attempts to draw a pop!"

"You bet we will!" assented Job.

"For," added Dick, "if the battle is to begin this early, we want to score the first victory!"

"You bet we do, and, what's more, we will!"

On came Mr. Tough, until he brought up at a standstill within a few feet of the tent, and gave vent to a snort, as he glared at the trio.

"Well, who might you be, and what d'ye want?" Dick demanded. "Are you a book-agent, tract-peddler, or a lightning-rod fiend?"

"Neither!" was the rejoinder. "I'm Bill Bullgard, the bouncer, and you fellers hev got to get up an' bounce out of this!"

"Why, is that you, William? I have often heard of you!"

"Ye hev, hey? Well, what d'yer heer 'bout me?" and the ruffian looked surprised that he was so well known.

"I've always heard, William!" pursued Dick, "that you were no earthly good—that you were a big blow-hard—that you were even afraid of yer own shadow!"

This attack fairly took the wretch's breath. He had expected to be eulogized as a hero, rather than ridiculed.

"You'll devilish quick find out who and what I am!" he retorted, savagely. "I've been ordered, by the boss, to run you off his premises, an' now I want yer to git up and git!"

"You don't say!"

"You kin bet yer sweet life, an' ef ye don't skin out lively, I'll bounce yer!"

"You don't say!"

And folding his arms across his chest, Deadwood Dick eyed the ruffian deliberately—at which Bill Bullgard was both astonished and enraged.

That the young man should dare to brave his wrath was something he could not understand.

"Be yer goin' ter git, or be ye not!" he roared, taking a step forward.

"Nixee git!" was the cool answer. "What'll we git for, William Henry Bullock?"

"Because ye'r ordered to. These 'ere lands cl'ar around this lake, belong ter Hank Hastings, an' he won't hev ye trespassin' on 'em, so he orders ye to take a skip!"

"But, you are not Henry Hastings?"

"No, but I'm his deputy, which aire jest the same!"

"Not with me. I always want my orders direct from headquarters. So, William, if you'll take a sensible piece of advice, you'll git!"

"What?"

"I repeat it you git! We intend to remain here, so you can go back to your master, and tell him so. Now git!" and the young detective suddenly thrust a pair of cocked revolvers under the ruffian's nose.

Bullgard made a hasty backward movement; then turning, he stalked off, coward as he was.

"Don't show up around here, again, Bullock, if you don't want to be slaughtered for fish-bait!" Dick called, after him.

"Oh! I ain't done wid ye yet!" was the answer.

CHAPTER VI.

A NOVEL SCHEME.

It was while he and Job were sitting on the lake shore, toward sunset, that Dick remarked:

"Job, an idea has struck me! I think I've conceived a feasible way of reaching the island, without discovery!"

"Ye don't say! Let's hear about it."

"Well, you see those ducks yonder?"

"Yes. I've bin watchin' 'em for some time. Seem sorter tame, don't they?"

"Yes. Big ones, too."

"I should remark. They're as large as ordinary geese. But, Lordy, boyee, ye couldn't ride one of them to the island!"

Dick laughed heartily.

"I think not," he replied; "at least, I have no intention of trying it!"

The ducks in question were seemingly a wild flock, who were swimming about quite near the shore. As compared with the ordinary wild fowl they were monsters, some of them being as large as a grown goose.

"Well, what about the ducks?" queried Old Job, curiously. "Want one for supper? Ef ye do, I'll pop him over, an' we'll get Nick to swim out an' fetch him ashore."

"No! I want three of the largest of 'em, but for a different purpose. Can you swim, Job?"

"Kin I swim? Well, I should belch up a bullfrog. Why, once upon a time—"

"There! there! that will do. I presume you can swim, I know Nick can, and I'm some at the sport, myself. Now, I'll tell you my plan. We'll secure three or four of the largest, and kill 'em. Then we will disembowel 'em, and fix their heads and necks so that they will remain in a natural position. When the ducks are disembowled, we can fit them down upon our heads, and without fear of detection we can swim to the island. The ducks will come far enough down over our heads, so as to leave our mouths and noses above water, and yet have our head-gear rest as naturally on the water, as though it were real live ducks. How like you the idea?"

Job gazed at Dick, admiringly.

"You're a brick!" he declared, "and the plan ought to work. There's only one drawback I can see."

"And what is that?"

"Why, when we approach the island, some o' them rantankerous cusses might take into their heads to pop us over. That wouldn't be so much fun—for us!"

"Oh! there's little danger of that!" Dick replied. "We won't start out until just toward dusk and the chances are ten to one we'll not attract the least attention, for there are plenty of duck about this lake. Then, too, it is highly probable the outlaws have discovered our arrival, and surmised our mission, and they'll naturally be rather chary of discharging firearms, as it will betray their presence on the island."

"That's so. Waal, I opine the racket orter work."

"We'll not attempt the swim until to-morrow night, and by that time we'll have everything in readiness."

"How about our guns?"

"We can't very well carry them along, but my water-tight bag will hold our revolvers, you know. I don't intend to have any shooting done, if we can help it. If we take any prisoners, it will be better to use strategy, rather than force."

"Go get our rifles and fetch Nick. We'll secure some of those ducks before they get too far away!"

Job obeyed, and soon returned with the weapons, accompanied by Nicodemus, all ready for a swim for the game.

When all was in readiness, four of the finest of the ducks were picked off, while the rest of the flock took to hasty flight.

Stepping quietly into the lake, Nicodemus swam out, secured the trophies, and brought them ashore, in triumph.

And fine specimens of their race they were.

It took the remainder of the day to disembowel them and prepare them for the purpose for which they were to be used. They were cleanly washed out and lined with some pieces of cloth; the necks were adjusted into natural positions.

Then all three tried on their novel headgear, and a most droll and ludicrous appearance they made.

"Quack! quack! fo' de lamb's sake, we looks jess like Feejee cannibals!" declared Nicodemus, skipping about the tent. "Hi! yi! Don' I wish my gal Susannah Slimington could gaze upon dis yar nigger dis bressed minnit! Fo' de Lor'! she'd hab a fit, shore!"

Both Dick and Job were forced to laugh at the ducky's antics. The Danger Ducks were a success!

The ducks were then put carefully away, and covered up with a blanket, so they were safe from discovery by any chance visitor.

The men went out, then, and lay down upon the sloping, grassy shore of the lake. The night was warm and pleasant, and the air exhilarating. The sky was clear and starlit, although there was no moon to light up the lake.

The beauty of the night seemed to charm the trio so much that they were not inclined to conversation. The picturesqueness of their surroundings seemed to have a lulling effect upon their senses, and they lay for a couple of hours without uttering a word.

Although it was not what could be called a

light night, one could see some little distance out upon the still water. The island, however, was not in sight.

As he lay half-reclining upon the grass, his mind actively employed in thought, and his gaze roving out upon the lake, Dick thought he saw a dark object a couple of hundred yards upon the starlit water.

He looked again, and then became sure he saw it. It was a dark ball, that bobbed up and down—now you saw it, now you didn't.

Dick's curiosity was aroused, but he resolved to say nothing to his partners until he was sure what the object was; so he watched and waited.

Two minutes passed; then Dick formed his conclusion what the bobbing, ball-like object was. It was the head of some person swimming ashore!

It was now considerably nearer to land than when he had first discerned it; so he called old Job's attention to it.

"Yas, I've had my peepers on the object," was the reply. "What d'ye make of it?"

"Why, it's the head of some person, who is swimming ashore!"

"Just my think. They're tryin' to s'prise us, hey, thinkin' we're asleep?"

"I reckon that's about the size of it."

"Why don't ye take yer gun, and put a buzzer through the cuss's noddle?"

"No, not yet. If it's one o' the outlaw gang, it will serve us better to capture than kill him! Let him get nearer, and I'll hail him!"

The ball-like object appeared to be approaching more rapidly now, and soon was within a dozen yards of shore.

Then Deadwood Dick sprung to his feet and brought his rifle to his shoulder.

"Hello! who comes there?" he cried.

"Stop! don't shoot, for God's sake! I am a friend," was the faint answer.

"Who are you?" shouted Dick.

"An escaped prisoner!"

"All right; come ahead."

A few minutes later a dripping figure emerged from the lake, and sunk down upon the bank, panting from exhaustion.

Dick and his pards surrounded him, and saw that he was a young man, apparently about Dick's own age. He wore a slight mustache and possessed a rather pleasant face.

"Had a pretty hard time getting ashore, eh?"

"Yes," was the gasping reply. "I was pretty weak when I struck out, and it was a hard pull to get here!"

"Well, I have an extra suit of clothes in my saddle-bags, so come to our tent and get on some dry duds, and you'll feel better."

The fellow thankfully accepted the offer, for the water was cold, and he evidently was chilled.

So they adjourned to the tent, Nicodemus remaining outside on sentinel duty.

Lighting his ever ready dark lantern, Dick produced dry clothing and moccasins, and in a few minutes the stranger was comfortably clad.

Then, Old Job, who was never without "the needful," gave him a dram, whereupon the young man announced himself as feeling better, and thanked God that he had succeeded in making his escape.

"You say you are an escaped prisoner," Dick said, when they were seated. "We should like to hear the particulars."

"Very well. I have no objections to giving them, for I hope you may never have to pass through what I have."

"My name is Fred Hart, and I came to this vicinity from 'Frisco, six months ago, to work for that villain, Henry Hastings. I worked faithfully for him for three months, and during that time was foolish enough to fall head over heels in love with his daughter, Honora, and sne with me."

"We managed to keep our affection for each other, for a time, from the old man's notice, but he finally found it out, and that we were engaged, and then he set up a howl, and discharged me."

"That night, as I was traveling through the valley, I was set upon by two masked ruffians, knocked down, clubbed nearly to death, and taken to the island in the lake."

"There, I was put in chains, fastened to a tree, and that has been my home, ever since. All the tramping space I had, was about ten feet, and there I have been forced to remain."

"Think of it! three long months of that sort of imprisonment, in all sorts of weather! I wonder I am here to tell of it, now."

"Once a day, a chunk of raw meat and a jug of water were given me, but I was glad even to get that, for I never gave up hope but what some day I would escape, to wreak vengeance on

Hastings. Day by day I worked at the chain belt that girded my waist, hoping to break it, and to-night, at last, it gave way, and you may be sure I lost no time in getting off the island."

"Well, you have indeed had a tough time!" Dick said. "I've had a taste of imprisonment myself, but it was 'way down in a deep dungeon not far from Sante Fe. Who were your keepers?"

"Although there were other ruffians on the island, no one ever came near me except a brute named Bill Bullgard, until two weeks ago, when Bullgard was replaced by a man of better appearance, whose name I do not know—a well-dressed fellow with jet-black mustache and goatee. He treated me more civilly than Bullgard."

"Victor Howell!" Dick said, turning to Job, with a nod.

"Yas, I presume so," was the reply.

"Did Henry Hastings ever visit you, Mr. Hart?"

"Only once; then he spat in my face, and kicked me! But, wait! I'll make him suffer twice what I have suffered—the execrable scoundrel!" and the ex-captive grated his teeth, while a deadly light shone from his eyes.

"I shouldn't blame you a bit, if you did!"

Dick replied. "I'm somewhat of a believer, myself, in the border code: 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. By the way, Mr. Hart, is it true that there is a gold mine on that island?"

"Yes, and that is where Hastings is getting all his riches. When he came to this valley, a year and a half ago, he wasn't worth a thousand dollars. Now I presume he could claim a good half a million. He professes to own that island, and the ruffians upon it are only hired by him. Most of them are murderers, whose secrets he holds, and they dare not refuse to work for him, lest he give them up to justice, for he keeps a detective on the spot as his superintendent, and this fellow is armed with warrants for every man!"

"It's a wonder they do not murder him!"

"Bah! they have no weapons, while he is a walking arsenal, and watches them like a hawk. Besides, the detective has two bloodhounds with him, constantly. The men are locked in a cabin at night, and the hounds set free. In daytime, Curly, the detective, is about, of course."

"Then, again, the men don't want to leave. They get five dollars' worth of wash gold, per day, an allowance of whisky, and their grub, and I suppose some of 'em are pretty rich, who have not gambled away their gold!"

CHAPTER VII.

MORE INFORMATION.

"How many people are there, upon the island, Mr. Hart?" Dick asked.

"At present there are six laborers, Curly, the detective, and the girl. Then there are two sentinels, who keep watch that no one gets on the place, and Bullgard and his successor, whenever they happen there about once a day!"

"This girl—who is she?"

"They call her Lady Sylvan, but her real name is Lena Lucas. She is another one of Hastings's victims, and likewise a prisoner. She is kept locked up, most of the time, but one day she watched her chance, and came to me, told me her story, and begged me that should I succeed in escaping, I would assist her."

"She is a niece of Hastings's, and was his ward, and a member of his family, up to within a short time before I entered his employ, when she fell heir to an immense fortune in the old country, which, she being under age, was to be paid to her guardian, for her, in monthly installments of somewhere about six thousand dollars, at a San Francisco bank. Hastings being her guardian, at once saw a chance to get her fortune, and had her shut up on the island, where she has been since, while he has been pocketing her belongings, month after month. Oh! he is a scoundrel, whose equal was never known."

"Day before yesterday Lena escaped, but by some means was recaptured, and was returned to the island this morning by Bullgard."

"How about her being in the island patrol boat?"

"That is for effect. Her feet are bound to the bottom, to keep her from jumping overboard. When any one is found to be trying to get upon the island, she is forced to warn them to keep away."

"The island must be rich in gold to pay the miners so much."

"Indeed it is! The entire surface is sand im-

pregnated with wash-gold. In the center is a sand mound, which is pricelessly rich in gold. The men have been digging away there for a year, and you can scarcely see where they have worked and washed. It is a strange phenomenon too, this island, for in no other part of Southern Oregon, can gold of any paying amount be found."

"It is remarkable, I'll admit—the whole thing. Do you think Hastings has any legal claim to the island?"

"I am certain he has not. He came here and took up lands belonging to the Government, without making any move toward pre-emption. In fact, he dare not, in his own name, for he is wanted in 'Frisco, to-day, for various forgeries and rascalities, in some of which the Government is interested."

"Then, I need not hesitate about carrying out my plans," Dick observed.

"What plans?" queried Hart.

"I intend to take possession of that island," Dick decided, promptly; at which Hart laughed ironically.

"I don't know who you are—do not even know your name," he said, "but you are foolish to think of such a thing!"

"Why so?"

"Because, do you suppose Hank Hastings, when he is coining money at the rate of a thousand dollars a week, or over, would allow you to snatch away his prize? Well, I guess not much! He'd organize an army of all the ruffians in Oregon, first. He has possession, and that is nine points of the law, in this wild and remote region."

"But, I can dispossess him. I am a United States detective, and can arrest him for lifting gold on Government property. That in itself is a misdemeanor. How far is it to the nearest telegraph station?"

"About forty miles, as the crow flies. Roseburg is the nearest."

"Then, sending to 'Frisco for official aid is out of the question, at present. I must make the arrests myself, when all is in readiness, and take my batch of prisoners to Salem. Oh! I'll work it, never fear!"

"I'll bet you a bottle of nectar you don't succeed, even though I'd like to see you," Hart said.

"How do you propose to proceed?"

"Well, in the first place, I propose to capture every person on the island, and make prisoners of all, except Miss Lucas, whose testimony I want against Hastings, the same as I want yours!"

"You shall have mine, with a vengeance!" Hart declared. "But go on!"

"Well, after I have made this move, I shall perhaps arrange to have the present miners remain on the island in my employ; for I shall pre-empt the property. However, I shall arrest the detectives, sentinels, the man Bullgard, the man with the black mustache and goatee—whom I think I can prove to be Gilbert Golden, of Salem, who cut his step-mother's throat in order to get possession of her money—and, last of all, the Hastings family. All of these I shall send to Salem for trial, on the ostensible charge of conspiring to defraud the Government, but really to secure them for various crimes. Then, I will fetch more men to the island, and work it in dead earnest, after having made the necessary arrangements with the Government!"

"Not Honora—you must not arrest her!" Hart protested, quickly. "She is as innocent as you are!"

"Do you mean to tell me she is innocent of her father's wrong-doing?"

"Perfectly so. She has not the faintest idea but what he is just what he appears to her—the soul of honor. I'll swear she knows nothing of his villainy, and if you will agree to spare her from arrest, I'll join you in your plans, although I am fearful that they will terminate disastrously."

"It's a bargain! But, why do you fear they will terminate disastrously?"

"Because, in the first place, it will take all your ingenuity to get on the island. The sentinels on duty are as sharp as foxes, and guard every point literally, at one and the same time!"

"John Smith succeeded!"

"But, was captured, and locked up as soon as he reached the island. In the daytime the sentinels are vigilant—at night the bloodhounds are on duty, and can scent human approach from afar, and give the alarm. It is worth a stranger's life to step upon that spot when they are turned loose."

"Nevertheless, we shall make the attempt tomorrow night!" Deadwood Dick announced. "We have quite a novel arrangement for the enterprise, and, I think it will work."

He then brought forth the ducks, and explained how they were to be utilized.

Hart examined them, minutely, and was loud in his expressions of approval.

"Can't help but work!" he declared, enthusiastically. "It's the most novel thing I ever heard of, by Jove. The only thing is those accursed dogs. They are to be feared. Capture the detective and sentinels, and the battle is half won, for the other men are not armed. When do you propose to start?"

"To-morrow evening, at dusk."

"That will be a good time. The dogs will be feeding in their kennels then, and the men will be at supper."

"Will you accompany us?"

"I don't know," Hart replied. "I shall have to leave you, before daybreak, and seek a hiding-place. It won't do for me to remain here, to-morrow, for when it is found I've escaped from the island, a great hue and cry will be made, and spies will be sent out to see if I am here."

"The order will be to shoot me at sight, when they find me. So I shall have to keep shady. If I am not here when you start for the island, I will have a duck prepared and be on the spot shortly after you—yes, perhaps before, for if I can get there while those infernal dogs are eating, I'll throw some poisoned meat to 'em, that will effectually settle their hash!"

"Capital idea! But where are you to get your poison from?"

"There is a bush that bears a berry, whose juice produces instant death. A little of that juice on a piece of meat will fix the dogs."

"Then I hope you will succeed in fixing 'em," Dick said, with a smile. "I am sorry I haven't a wig and false beard, so you could disguise yourself and remain with us. I usually carry around a good stock of such things with me, but neglected to bring any along this trip."

"It will be better for both of us if I do not remain here, for if I should be discovered, it would make it bad for all hands. I will get away pretty soon under the cover of darkness, and secure a good hiding-place before daybreak. I know just the place."

About an hour later he bundled up his wet clothes, and, saying good-night, took his departure.

CHAPTER VIII.

GRAVE SUSPICIONS.

"Dickey, me boy?"

"Well, Job, what is it? You look as gloomy as did your namesake when he was troubled with boils."

"Dickey, me boy, I've got a sort o' premonitory that all ain't right."

"A premonition, you mean, Job?"

"Waal, yes."

"Why, what's troubling you? Everything is lovely, and the goose hangs at a fine altitude!"

"Waal, I feel sorter uneasy like. You're a darned smart feller, boy, an', as I've seen on several occasions, you've got pluck an' grit enough for a dozen men. But it strikes me there's one thing ye're sorter lackin' in."

"What's that, Job? I should like to know, so as to, if possible, make a correction of that particular defect."

"Well, I don't jest know what the dixyunary word fer it is, but ye take too much stock in what folks tell ye."

"Why, how so?"

"Ca'se ye do. When a feller reels off to me a yarn as long as a s'arch-warrant, I makes it a pint to set aside one-hundredth part of it as a bare possible truth, and the rest of it as a condemned lie!"

"Well, I don't know but there's a little horse-sense about that, too. Yet, Job, you must remember you go a little wide of a certain scriptural commandment sometimes. But who are you flinging stones at, anyhow?"

"The feller who jest left us, to be sure. How do ye know but what he war givin' ye a ghost story, an' so will scoop ye in?"

"Pshaw! no. He told a straight story, and I'd stake my life on his veracity. I'm a good judge of human character, I flatter myself, and if he'd been lying to me, I should have known it. Why, what caused you to suspect that he was not telling a straight story?"

"Well, one reason was because, after having seen them ducks, he tuk a sudden notion et war about time fer him to slope. Hadn't mentioned et, until he found out *how* we proposed to reach the island!"

"Pshaw! you're too suspicious, Job. If he had been a spy, he'd never have given away so much information, as freely as he did. He's all square, so dismiss all thoughts to the contrary from your mind!"

There the discussion dropped; but, by the expression of the old frontiersman's weather-beaten visage, it was easy to see that he was not satisfied.

The hour was now late, and it was resolved to get some rest, preparatory to the work ahead for the next night, when it was not likely there would be much sleep; so as Dick did not apprehend that they would have any more visitors during the nocturnal hours, Nicodemus was called in from guard duty, and the three threw themselves down upon their blankets.

The lantern, however, was left burning, so that in case of sudden trouble, they would have some light on the subject.

Dick was never a sound sleeper, in his most secure moments; and to-night, he rolled and tossed about on his blanket, simply in an uneasy slumber.

Suddenly in this light sleep, he was assailed by an intuition of human presence—imagined some one was looking at him.

His eyes opened, and he sat bolt upright.

He was not mistaken.

The curtains were parted, and the ugly head of Bullgard was thrust into the tent!

Quick as a flash, Dick drew a revolver and fired, but, quick as he was, the head was withdrawn quicker, and the sound of retreating footsteps, and absence of a cry of pain, warned him that for once his aim had failed him.

"Confound the rascal," he growled, "I wonder what he was lurking around here for? I'm sorry I didn't wing him."

He sprang to his feet, and rushed from the tent, but Bullgard was nowhere to be seen.

The shot of course aroused both Old Job and Nicodemus, and they came rushing from the tent, demanding to know what was the matter.

Dick briefly explained.

"Humph! the cuss came here to murder us!" Job declared.

"No, I think not," Dick replied. "More likely he was sent to see if Fred Hart was here."

Job shrugged his shoulders.

"Ye will have it that feller was an escaped prisoner?"

"To be sure I will. You, nor no one else could convince me differently!"

"Well, wait! We'll see. You'll be convinced, when ye find out differently!"

"Then, and only then."

There was no more sleep that night, nor were there any more prowlers near the camp.

Morning at last dawned, and after Nicodemus had caught a mess of fish, breakfast was soon had.

During the forenoon Hastings was seen riding toward the camp, mounted upon a splendid bay horse.

"Wonder what he's coming here for," Dick said, as he and Job stood in front of the tent. "He'll get a warm reception if he gives me any of his insolence."

"He's cum to order us off, likely," was Job's view.

Henry Hastings did not look in a particularly unpleasant mood as he rode up and drew rein.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bristol," he saluted, with a bow.

"Good-morning," Dick returned, civilly.

"I thought I'd ride over, Mr. Bristol, and tender an apology for my seeming aggressiveness toward you. I've found that you were right, and had I heeded your warning I'd be better off."

"How do you mean?"

"I speak of that infernal scamp representing himself to me as Alex Dufrane, of 'Frisco."

"Well, isn't he Dufrane?"

"By no means. The cursed rascal was a rank impostor!"

"I told you so," smiled Dick.

"Very true, but I doubted you. So much for being a fool. The fellow skipped out some time during the night, after chloroforming us and going through the house, securing my daughter's jewels and fifteen hundred dollars in money."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, and I don't suppose there's any use of trying to follow him!"

"No earthly use," Dick calmly assured. "The fact is, you ought to be glad you're livin'."

Hastings winced a little at this, but answered:

"I suppose so. By the way, Bristol, can't you come over and take dinner with us? It was

my daughter's express wish that I should invite you."

"Very sorry, sir, but it will be impossible for me to accept the invitation. I am very busy, and can't get away."

"Mapping out plans of how to get on to the island, I presume?"

"Well, yes, partly that."

"Hope you'll succeed. When do you propose to make the attempt?"

"That's uncertain. As soon as I can get ready, and I can't say when that will be."

"Well, I must be going. Sorry you can't dine with us. Remember you are a welcome guest at any future time. Good-morning."

"Good-morning."

Then the farm-owner wheeled his horse and galloped away.

CHAPTER IX.

A TRAITOR AFTER ALL!

"THE confounded old hypocrite! I wonder if he thought he pulled the wool over my eyes!" Deadwood Dick exclaimed in disgust, after Hastings had ridden away. "I wonder if he takes me for a fool, anyhow?"

"That's about the size of et!" old Job declared. "Do you suppose Howell has left the farm-house?"

"Possibly, but, if he has, he's gone over to the island. The invitation Hastings gave me to dinner was merely a dodge to get me there and drug me. They already begin to fear me, and while they are evidently averse to committing outright murder, they want to get me quietly out of the way!"

"Yes, et kind o' looks that way."

The day passed slowly, especially to Dick, who was anxious to put his plans into execution.

His was one of those restless spirits, who, when adventure was in prospect, was anxious to hurry up the coming and possible events.

Nothing was seen or heard of Fred Hart, during the day. He had evidently found his proposed hiding-place; if so he was not a spy of the Owls. Was he true?

Finally the shadows of night began to gather over the landscape. The trio had everything in readiness for their departure. Their horses were securely lariatied out to fresh grass. Their rifles, saddles, and other effects they were forced to leave behind, in the tent.

Just before the dusk became too dense, Dick made a welcome discovery, with the aid of his glass. A flock of wild ducks were hovering on the water, near the island.

As soon as it became dark enough so that the island was but dimly perceptible, the three men put on their strange headgear, took a last look at their camp, and waded out into the lake until they got neck-deep, when they struck out on their novel and uncertain journey, and swam toward the island.

None knew what fate was in store for them, or whether they would ever reach mainland again, or not. They had entered upon an adventure, which, say the least, could but be attended by great peril.

Dick's confidence and pluck never wavered, however, and he took the lead.

As the three swam, they kept but the mouth and nose above water, and thus their duck-head covering moved gracefully along on the rippling waves.

The deception was complete, and would have fooled an experienced hunter.

Steadily on swam the three brave men; for Nicodemus was as plucky and venturesome as his white brethren.

The island at length loomed up close at hand, and soon they were in the shadow of its banks.

All was as silent as the tomb. Not a sign of life was visible along the shore.

For several minutes the three "Danger Ducks" cruised along the banks, making no effort to leave the water.

Then, still detecting no sign of human presence, Deadwood Dick clambered ashore.

His comrades immediately followed, and the three sat for a minute upon the bank, to regain breath, for, in truth, they were pretty well winded.

As they sat thus, they were suddenly pounced upon by not less than half a dozen powerful men, and, despite their desperate struggles, were bound, hand and foot. Then they were seized by the feet, and dragged swiftly back through woods, until they came to an open glade, about in the center of the island.

Here was one large log cabin, and several smaller ones, formed in a sort of circle at the outskirts of the glade.

In front of each of these burned a camp-fire, that lit the glade in every part with a lurid glow.

Here the prisoners were placed upon their feet, and saw around them nine persons, six of whom were their villainous-looking captors.

The seventh person was a sharp-featured, hook-nosed, ferret-eyed man—with curly hair, and whom Dick at once set down as the detective Fred Hart had spoken of.

The eighth individual was none other than Victor Howell, while the ninth was the ruffian, Bill Bullgard.

"Hol! hol! my fine fellows, so you got here, did you?" Howell cried, exultantly. "You will come nosing around where you've no business to, will you?"

"I've nosed you out, at any rate, Gilbert Golden!" was Dick's defiant retort.

The villain started back aghast.

"What's that?" he demanded, fiercely.

"I say, I've identified you," replied Dick.

"You are Gilbert Golden, the Salem murderer. You cut your mother-in-law's throat, in order to get her money. I took your trail and have found you. You should have chosen a better disguise than hair-dye, you detestable villain!"

"You lie! you lie!" yelled the man, rushing up to Dick, and striking him a stinging blow in the face. "I'll choke the life out of you for lying about me, you infernal cur!" and his hands clutched Dick's throat in a vise-like gripe.

"No, ye don't!" cried Bill Bullgard, rushing forward, and forcing the wretch to relinquish his grip, after which he hurled Golden away. "If there's any chokin' to be done, mister, jest wait till the boss comes. He'll attend to that. An' you keep yer dukes off the prisoner or I'll break yer jaw. I don't luv this cuss much, myself, but you ain't goin' ter touch him when his hands air tied. I opine ef he was free, he'd do you up in a holy second!"

"You bet I would!" declared Dick, at which there was a snicker among the crowd.

As for Golden, as we shall henceforth know him, he slunk back, with evil-gleaming eyes, and had nothing more to say.

"Better fasten the prisoners to a tree!" the Frisco detective advised Bullgard. "The boss may not be here for an hour yet."

The order was obeyed, the trio being tied to trees, but a few feet apart.

Then silence prevailed, as far as the captors were concerned. The outlaws stood around and stared at the prisoners, with grim expressions of countenance. They were a hard-looking set of men, bearded, frowsy haired, and slovenly dressed—men whose natures long lives of vice had corrupted beyond redemption.

Curly, Bill Bullgard and Golden, withdrew to one side, and conversed in an undertone.

The camp-fires burned brightly, the flames leaping high and spitefully into the air, as if to mock the prisoners' discomfiture.

Dick took the capture the coolest of the trio, although he, too, had keen misgivings for the future. He was well aware that he was a prisoner in the fold of a pack of human wolves, and what fate was in store for him and his companions he did not dare to contemplate.

One thing he was resolved on: if he was to die, he would die game.

Old Job was grim, and plainly down-hearted, while the rolling whites of the eyes of Nicodemus told that he was frightened nearly out of his wits.

"Cheer up, Job!" Dick said, encouragingly. "There's no use crying over spilled milk. We're better off than half a dozen dead men, yet!"

"Not much," was the reply. "Ah! boyee, ef ye'd only heeded my suspicions consarnin' thet Fred Hart, we'd not be in this fix now."

"Maybe not, but I am not yet sure that we owe our capture to Fred Hart!"

"I wish I was as sure o' ever gittin' off this cussed island, alive."

"Oh! it is not likely they'll kill us—at least, not you and Nick. If they elect me to that fate, why I ain't afeard to die!"

"Waal, you've got grit, boyee!"

Just then a man came running out from among the trees.

It was Fred Hart!

He was a traitor, after all.

"It's all right!" he shouted, "the captain will be here in a few minutes!"

CHAPTER X.

A SINGULAR TRIAL.

"THERE!" exclaimed Job Johnson, with a malicious sort of triumph. "Didn't I tell you thet he war a decoy an' a villain?"

"I must confess to your superior judgment,"

Dick replied, a little crestfallen. "Well, that's the way the world goes."

Fred Hart came sauntering smilingly forward.

"Good-evening, gents!" he saluted. "Sorry to see you in this fix; I am, by Jove. But, I had to do it in order to save my own bacon; I did, by Jove!"

"You are an infernal liar and a villain—a contemptible sneak and coward!" Deadwood Dick declared, with flashing eyes.

"Lightly, now, lightly. Wait till you hear from me. I was imprisoned in chains, just as I told you. There was no gamin about that. Part of the rest I told you is true—part fiction. But, enough of that. I was near dead in the chains. I was in torture, and should have gone crazy if I'd stayed there much longer."

"They came to me and offered me a chance for my life. They said I must first join the gang; then I must swim to your camp, representing myself an escaped prisoner, and tell a lot of ghost stories about this island, and so forth, and find out how you intended to reach the island and report back, so you would fall into their clutches."

"I hated to do it, but the temptation of freedom was too much, and I consented. You know how well I succeeded. All I've got to say to you is, that you were too confiding a gilly, suffering from big head. Very likely you will soon be where I was. If so, here is a bit of good, solid, sensible advice: As I did, go thou and do likewise."

Then the traitor passed on with a sardonic laugh.

Deadwood Dick's anger was so great that he could not give utterance to a word, and from their silence it was evident Job and Nick were in the same state of feeling.

Now followed another wait of full half an hour's duration—a wait for the arrival of the captain, whom Dick was convinced was none other than Henry Hastings.

Dick occupied the time in gazing inquiringly about him; and as a result of his observations, came to the conclusion that the report of a gold mine on the island was all a hoax. The even surface showed no sign of having ever been disturbed by pick or bar; nor did the ruffianly gang who hovered around him have the appearance of men who were accustomed to delve for gold.

What, then, was the occupation of "The Owls?"

At last there went up a shout, as two figures appeared from among the trees.

The captain was coming, sure enough, and, as Dick had surmised, he was none other than Henry Hastings.

His companion, much to the prisoner's surprise, was—Honora!

Both father and daughter were well attired, making a marked contrast with their confederates.

Curly, Bullgard and Golden came forward and greeted them, after which Hastings alone turned to the prisoners, Honora remaining aloof.

"Well, Bristol, I see you have at last carried out your plans, and persevered in reaching the floating island," Hastings observed.

Dick shut his teeth close, and made no answer.

At which the Captain of the Owls laughed dryly.

"Oh! there's no use of your sulking," he said. "I believe I warned you against coming here, and told you you would have to take the consequences of your rashness, and they are very grave!"

Still no answer from the detective prince, other than the vengeful gleaming of the tell-tale eyes.

"Yes, the consequences are very grave," Hastings repeated, getting no answer. "This island belongs to a band of desperate men, known as the Owls of Oregon, and they consider it sacredly their own, safe from the encroachment of civilization. They never disturb or molest any one beyond the boundaries of their own domain, and consider it a punishable offense for any one to trespass here."

"One man tried it, and received the full measure of the Owls' vengeance. Then you came, and learning that it was also your intention to penetrate the secrets of their home, they resolved to also make an example of you; so a trap was set for you, and you fell into it. You have no one to blame but yourself."

"Who said I had, you murdering scoundrel?" cried Dick, unable longer to restrain his rage.

"Oh, pooh! I do not care how much you abuse me," was the reply. "You wouldn't heed

my advice, and I do not hold myself responsible for what may happen to you. You will be tried on the merits of the case, and Lady Sylvan, the queen of the island, will sentence you, accordingly. While I hate to see a smart young man like you go to ruin, it is not in my power to go contrary to the will of the people. Boys, bring the prisoners forward."

And then the thief walked away.

In front of the door of the larger cabin was a low platform, on which were three chairs. To these Henry Hastings and his daughter proceeded, and became seated, occupying the two outside chairs, and leaving the center one vacant.

The prisoners were unloosed from the trees, their feet freed, and then were marched in front of the platform, where they were bound to three posts that were there planted in the ground.

The outlaws gathered around, close in the vicinity, grim and silent.

The man, Curly, and Gilbert Golden, occupied positions at either end of the platform, and the eyes of the latter gleamed with unspeakable exultation.

Henry Hastings surveyed the prisoners for several minutes in silence, as if weighing in his mind what to say. His face was hard and un pitying, and noticeable for its grayish pallor; something unusual was this, too, for he was naturally of an apoplectic complexion.

Honora's face was very pale, too, and as hard expressed as that of her father.

When Hastings had gazed at the prisoners in silence for fully five minutes, he turned to Curly.

"Bring Sylvan!" he ordered.

Curly obeyed, by entering the cabin, and returning directly, leading a maiden by the hand, who was attired in a flowing robe of white, and whom Curly forced back upon the vacant chair in a way by no means gentle.

The three prisoners gave a start when they saw the maiden, for they recognized her.

She was the waif who had appeared at their camp, ten miles up the valley, a few nights before, and whom they found missing in the morning.

Her face was almost corpse-like in its pallor, and her eyes were red from recent weeping.

She gave the prisoners one swift, startled glance, and then dropped her gaze.

She evidently recognized them, and Dick could see that she was trembling violently. With all his heart he pitied her.

Hastings spoke a few words to her in an undertone, at which she grew, if anything, paler, and with a crying gasp, sunk back unconscious. Water was quickly dashed in her face, and it took several applications before consciousness was restored.

Then, she did not look up, but continued to tremble like an aspen.

After speaking to her again, in an evidently menacing tone, Hastings arose and began:

"Prisoners at the bar: As representative of the Owls of Oregon it is my duty to try you for the unjustifiable and unlawful crime of trespass, with intent to rob."

"The Owls of Oregon are not a body of men banded for plunder, but they are a people—a band by themselves, separate from the world, with their own laws and their own individual rights;—a people few in number, but strong in their own domain. This is their State, their empire, and they hold it sacred to themselves. They rightfully claim to do as they please in their own home, without outside interference; they rightfully claim that no one has any business to encroach upon them, or meddle with their affairs. Yet you have sought to do so."

"They regard your invasion as a misdemeanor, and according to their laws this misdemeanor is attended by severe punishment."

"Therefore, you must abide by the consequences of your rashness and accept the sentences passed upon you with the best grace possible."

"Your judge will be Lady Sylvan, the queen of the isle, and a woman whose wisdom is profound. I will now try each of you separately, and impartially."

"Colored man, what is your name?"

"Nicodemus Noodle, sah."

"What is your age?"

"Twenty-eight, sah."

"What is your occupation?"

"Hain't got none, sah."

"Are you not a detective?"

"No, sah."

"Why did you come to this island?"

"To't dar was gold here, sah."

"Did you not know this island was inhabited?"

"No, sah."
 "Did you not know you were committing a grave misdemeanor in coming here?"
 "No, sah."
 "Have you any relatives living?"
 "None dat I knows ob, sah."
 "Nicodemus, I fear your early training was sadly neglected as far as veracity is concerned. Lady Sylvan, what shall this man's sentence be?"

Lady Sylvan was trembling like a leaf; her lips moved, but no sound came forth.

"Speak up!" thundered Hastings savagely. There was a momentary silence, then she faintly replied:

"Give him to the dogs!"

"Nicodemus Noodle, the sentence is: 'Give him to the dogs!' That means you will be unloosed and given twenty yards the start of a pair of bloodhounds. If you reach the water before they do, you are all right. If they reach you before you reach the river, may God have mercy on your soul! Bullgard, bring forth the dogs!"

CHAPTER XI.

DICK'S SENTENCE.

A WAIL of terror went up from Nicodemus as he heard the inhuman sentence imposed upon him.

"Oh, fo' de Lor', good massa, don't set de dogs on dis pore nigger!" he pleaded, quaking in abject terror. "Oh, don't, good massa! Dis yar chile nebber did no harm to you, sah—'deed suah he didn't, sah! For de lub ob de great Jerusalem, spar' dis pore soul, who nebber done any one any harm, 'deed he didn't!"

But Hastings turned upon the appealing man, and laughed heartlessly.

"Oh, you inhuman fiend!" cried Dick, almost beside himself with rage; "if God will only spare me until I can tear your heart out and trample it beneath my feet in the dirt, I will be so thankful!"

But his words were unheeded.

From a pen near by Bullgard led forth two savage hounds, whose eyes were like balls of fire and who lapped their chops as if hungry for human blood.

Four stalwart Owls then released Nicodemus, and conducted him to a point some twenty yards from the hounds, which distance brought him near to the edge of the glade.

It took the united efforts of the four men to hold him, so great was his desperation.

At the word from Hastings they let him go, and he darted into the woods.

The bloodhounds started the same instant in hot pursuit, baying fiercely as they went.

"May God grant he escapes!" Dick said to Job, whose chin was dropped upon his breast and who seemed utterly dispirited.

"Ay, ay!" was the fervent response.

Every one listened with a sort of fascinated horror for some tidings of the result of the race between the negro and the dogs.

All they could hear was a thrashing through the underbrush and the baying of the hounds, and finally even these sounds ceased.

The dogs, ere long, came sneaking back, looking decidedly sheepish over having lost their game.

"By all the furies, the dogs let the nigger escape them!" cried Hastings.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" yelled Deadwood Dick. "Bully for Nicodemus!"

"Shut up!" roared Hastings. "You've no cause to yell. If the nigger did escape, you won't!"

"Can't help that, you fiend!" Dick retorted. "I'm only glad that one of us was lucky enough to escape!"

Hastings's reply was a curse.

"Come, old man, look up!" he ordered. "What's your name?"

"Job Johnson!" was the prompt reply.

"What's your business?"

"I'm a miner and prospector."

"What did you come to this island for?"

"Ter assist in breakin' up a nest o' cussed thieves an' cut-throats, blast yer picter!" was the blunt response.

"Oh! you did, eh? Well, you're frank about it, to say the least. Where do you live?"

"Nowhar!"

"That's a place I never heard of. How old are you?"

"Sixty."

"Old enough to be in your grave long ago. Got any relatives?"

"Nary one."

"Did you know this island was occupied, when you came here?"

"Yes, I reckon I did."

"Did you know it was unsafe to come here?"

"Heard so."

"Then, why did you come?"

"Ca'se I wanted to."

"Do you want to die?"

"Hain't purtic'lar about et, jest yet awhile!"

"Now, look here, Johnson; you're a pretty rugged old reprobate, and likely to be useful for several years, yet. To save your life, would you take the iron-clad oath of an Owl, and become a faithful member of the gang?"

"No, I wouldn't!"

"You'd rather die, then?"

"Rather than become a blackleg and a cut-throat, yes!"

"Then you shall have your choice. Sylvan pass sentence on this man."

Sylvan's lips moved, but the prisoners could hear no audible response.

Hastings bent close to her, and then straightened up:

"Job Johnson!" he said, "your sentence is as follows: You are to-night to receive forty lashes upon the bare back, doused with salt water, and locked up. This treatment will be continued every day, until either you join the Owls, or kick the bucket."

"And, now, Mr. Deadwood Dick, we'll attend to your case. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Oh! I'm feeling quite well, thank you!" Dick returned, nonchalantly.

"You are, hey? Well, I must say I admire your nerve. You are inclined to be funny!"

"I was born that way, d'ye know!"

"None of your impudence to me, sir. What was your prime object in coming to this island?"

"To find out what sort of a place it was, see what was going on, and so forth!"

"You found out, didn't you?"

"I should remark!"

"I suppose you realize you've poked your nose into the wrong hornets' nest?"

"More appropriately, a snakes' nest."

"As you will. Do you know you can never leave this island alive?"

"Not till you told me."

"Well, you can't. By rights, you ought to be put to death immediately, but you are a smart fellow, and would make a valuable addition to the Owl organization—"

"Let up on that!" Dick cried. "You might just as well try to induce me to join Satan's first regiment of imps and become adorned with horns and tail. No Owls in mine, if you please!"

"Sylvan, sentence this man!" was the fierce order.

"No! no! no! he shall not be sentenced!" Sylvan cried, springing to her feet, and rushing from the platform to the stake, where she threw her arms around Dick's neck. "I love this man, and you shall not harm him. Kill me if you like, but set him free!"

Hastings looked thunderstruck.

"Well, I like this!" he growled. "She loves the vagabond, and yet never saw him before. Bullgard!"

"Yes, boss!"

"Take the girl away, and lock her up, I'll attend to her case later on. I'll sentence this fellow myself!"

Bullgard tore the screaming girl away, and dragged her rudely into the cabin, and locked the door upon her.

Hastings, then turning to Dick, said, "I am inclined to be lenient with you, in hopes of your joining the Owls as their lieutenant. So, instead of making it instant death, I will make your first sentence three days in the chains. If you have not come to terms by the expiration of three days, you shall be buried alive!"

CHAPTER XII.

POOR JOB'S FIRST TASTE OF THE LASH.

DEADWOOD DICK received this decision without a murmur. He knew it was his death sentence!—knew it because he would die before he would yield to the enemy, and become an Owl.

His face was perfectly impassive; he made no comment whatever.

He thought not of himself, noble fellow, but of the suffering old Job must undergo.

The old man seemed utterly broken down at the sentence imposed upon him, and stood at the stake, with his head bowed and eyes riveted upon the ground before him.

"Cheer up, Job, poor fellow," Dick said, and there was moisture in his eyes as he spoke. "Perhaps we may escape yet."

The old man shook his head, gravely.

"No, that is out of the question," he answered huskily. "You may, but I—never. They will kill me by inches, but they'll find me game to the last!"

"I know they will, Job. You would be the last man to weaken. Maybe it would be better for you if you did join these fiends!"

"Me? No! never, never!"

"No more will I. I will die like a man, first!"

"Here, too. An', Dickey, ef I go under, and it should be your fortune to escape, you may some day run across a chap they call Jolly Johnson—sort of a sportin' feller, you see. Waal, he's a son of mine. Jist tell him fer me that his old dad died game, as all the Johnson family have done, of our race of Johnsons, an' tell him I hope he'll keep a stiff upper lip, an' if it is fate to die with his boots on, he'll be as game as was his dad before him."

"I'll tell him; and Job, no matter how excruciating may be your pain, when undergoing punishment, bear this in mind: If it should be my good and unexpected luck to escape from this island, with my life, I promise you that your wrongs shall be fully and terribly avenged!"

"Thankee, boyee, for them words! They'll help the old man to bear the punishment with greater fortitude."

At this juncture the voice of Hastings was heard.

"Put the younger prisoner in chains, and see that he has nothing to eat or drink for three days."

A heavy stake had already been deeply planted in the center of the glade. It was some ten feet in height, and at the top was a stout iron ring, connected with which was one end of a long, heavy and short-linked chain.

A fine-linked chain belt was locked about Dick's waist, and interwoven in this belt was a stout iron ring.

Dick was unbound from the stake in front of the platform, and conducted to the center of the glade, where the loose end of the long chain was coupled with the ring in his belt, by a stout padlock. The thongs that bound his limbs were then removed, and, although he had a radius of twenty feet roaming space, he was a prisoner for all that.

His pockets were then searched, and everything removed, after which he was left to himself.

"Prepare the old man for the lash!" was the next stentorian order of Hastings. "Have a bucket of salt water to dose him with after he has received the forty stripes."

"Oh, you hellion! If I only could get free, wouldn't I make it warm for you!" breathed Deadwood Dick, with set teeth, "but, maybe my chance will come yet. I'm not so sure I'm going to wear these chains for three days. Woe be unto you and your marble-hearted daughter, Henry Hastings, if ever I do get free!"

For he felt bitter toward Honora as well as her father. She had sat throughout the trial cold and impassive, without seeming to have the least interest in, or mercy for, the prisoners. She had glanced at Dick several times, but it was a cold stare which betrayed no recognition of the man who had saved her life.

Evidently she was as hard-hearted as her cold-blooded parent.

Old Job was now unfastened from the stake and stripped of his clothing to the waist. He was then re-bound with his face toward the stake.

"Now, then, Bullgard, get your whip!" Hastings ordered, "and give the prisoner forty lashes, and you needn't be lazy with your muscle, neither!"

Bullgard nodded and grinned, and entered one of the cabins.

He soon returned with an ugly-looking bull-whip, and at a signal from the Owl captain, began to lay on the lash.

Every cruel blow drew blood.

But we will draw the curtain over the scene.

Suffice to say that when the fortieth blow was struck, Old Job had not fainted, nor had he uttered a cry of pain, although his back was raw and bleeding sore.

A bucket of salt water was now dashed over his back, and the intense agony thereby produced caused him to utter a loud groan.

He was then released from the stake, dragged away, and locked up in a cabin that had no windows.

Poor Job!

How Dick's heart bled for him; how he chafed in his chained restraint, and prayed to his Maker that he might be free, to wreak vengeance for the horrors and sufferings of this terrible night!

While Hastings was giving instructions to

Curly, prior to departing for home, his daughter left the platform and walked over to where Deadwood Dick was confined, taking good care, however, to keep just out of his reach.

"I am sorry for you, Mr. Bristol," she said.

"Yes you are!" Dick returned. "You're fearfully, awfully sorry! Methinks I can see you shedding tears of sorrow by the bucketful. Your hell-hound father is sorry, too!"

"You must not blame me for my father's misdeeds," she said, flushing, "for I am not responsible for them, and am powerless to prevent them. You saved my life, and I would like to save yours, but I dare not attempt it. Papa would kill me!"

"Oh! you needn't put yourself to any trouble!" Dick retorted, coldly. "You're as bad as he is, or you would not have come to witness the shocking scenes of to-night!"

"Papa forced me to come. I didn't want to come, but he would have killed me if I hadn't. He said he wanted to harden my heart. Heaven knows what I have seen to-night is enough to harden any one's heart."

"I don't think it could make any impression on yours!" was Dick's sarcastic response.

At which Miss Honora turned away.

Hastings and his daughter soon afterward left the island, accompanied by Gilbert Golden.

Then things became quiet.

The camp-fires burned low, and the men disappeared within the cabins, except one sentinel, who paced to and fro across the glade, with a repeating rifle at his shoulder.

"Poor Job," muttered Dick, as at last he lay down upon the ground. "How he must be suffering!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE.

"By golly, dat was a cluss shave, if ebber dar wus one!"

It was mid-day, succeeding the night witnessing the events chronicled in our last chapter—a beautiful day, with clear sky, radiant sunlight, and balmy breezes.

Up the beautiful valley of the Sylvan Lake, some three miles from the Hastings farm-house, a dilapidated specimen of the colored race was sitting upon a bowlder, sunning himself.

As the reader may imagine, he was none other than Nicodemus Noodle.

And such a noodle!

A sorrier looking "coon" could not have been found within a thousand miles. His clothing was half-torn from his person, and where patches of bare skin were exposed to view, there also were bloody scratches.

He was hatless and barefooted.

Poor Nick!

He had escaped from the island of horrors with his life, but that was about all.

"Yes, dat was de clusset shave I ebber had in my life," he mused, as he sat gazing at the ground before him, rather dubiously. "Jerusalem! but how dem dogs did git down an' hump 'emselves. An' how dis nigger did git down an' hump hisself, likewise accordingly! Dem dogs nipped, an' dis chile tucked!"

"But, I beat 'em—yes, golly, I beat 'em fo' suah. Dey had deir moufs all puckered up fo' a squar' ole coon feed, but dey got leff—ha! ha! dey got badly leff, fo' suah! Whoof! but *didn't* I make de dust fly, tho'? No tar-heel 'bout dis chile, if his feet am a trifle small!"

"Too bad 'bout dese clothes," he muttered. "Dem dogs wasn't no respecters of pussons, or dey wouldn't hab amperated so much of my duds as to make me disrepresentable fo' society. Golly, but ain't I glad my gal Susanna ain't yar to see me! She'd bu'st her sides a-laffin', fo' suah! But, tain't no laffin' matter. Dis yar nigger nebber was fetched to go p'radin' roun' in rags, nohow. Wish some feller wid gud clothes w'u'd come dis way, an' golly, I'd make him swap, I would fo' suah! I hab de inducements, right yar, to make him swap even!" And he laid his hand affectionately on his repeating rifle, which leaned against the bowlder.

In swimming ashore, he had taken the precaution to land at the camp and secure his rifle, which he had carefully hidden in the grass.

This was about the only thing of any value remaining there, the horses, saddles and other effects having already been spirited away.

So, that, at least, Nick was not defenseless.

"I wonder ef they killed Marse Dick, an' ole Johnsing?" he mused, his face growing grave. "Golly, I s'pose I orter go back an' find out. Dey was bofe good frien's to me. Can't help it, dough! Don't ketch dis nigger back on dat island ag'in, no sah-ree!"

"If I se to go back dar ag'in, dem dogs would demolish de rest of dis nigger's wardrobe; den w'ot de worl' he do? De ole man uster tell me dat charity begin at home, an' I reckon de ole man orter know suthin' 'bout charity, for he was s'ported by it fo' a hull year, after he wuz caught in Parson Davies's hen-roost—Hello! who dis a-comin'?"

A woman was coming up the valley, from the direction of the lake. She was well-dressed, and graceful of carriage.

"By golly, dat's Miss Honora Hastings," Nick exclaimed. "Wonder what she's doing up dis way, so fur from home? Reckon dis nigger better make hisself scarce, till she go by."

There was a large clump of bushes directly back of the bowlder, and seizing his gun, Nick lost no time in concealing himself.

Miss Honora came tripping along, and halted by the bowlder.

She was looking very pale, and evidently had been weeping.

She had stood by the rock but a few minutes, when dashing down the valley came a horseman.

When he reached where Honora was standing, he drew rein, and leaping to the ground, clasped her in his fond embrace.

"Honora, my darling!" he said, kissing her.

"Roderic, my hero!" she murmured, returning the caress.

"Oh! yum! yum! yum!" muttered Nicodemus, in the thicket.

"Honora, my precious, how has the world been using you?" asked her lover, who was dressed as a lieutenant of the U. S. Army.

"The world has been using me better than its people, Roderic."

"Ah! how is that? Why, you have been weeping!"

"Yes, I have been weeping, and little's the wonder I have. My father has been *whipping* me!"

"Been whipping you? *your* father been whipping *you*, Honora? Pray explain!"

"I *will*, Roderic. I have been keeping something from you—something I ought to have told you, long ago, only I didn't dare. My father is, I am ashamed to say, a very bad, unscrupulous man. He is, while pretending to be a farmer, a counterfeiter, and the chief of a band of counterfeiters, who have their headquarters on the island opposite our home."

"Of late, my father has become devoid of all principle, and, among other things, has associated with him a villain greater than himself—a man named Gilbert Golden."

"This morning he tried to force me into an alliance with Golden—a wretch whom I loathe and despise—and when I positively refused, he whipped me until my back is all sore. I finally escaped and came here, expecting to meet you, as you had promised to be here."

"The brute!" Roderic exclaimed. "Why, I will go to the farm-house, and thrash him within an inch of his life."

"No, you will not! Vengeance is *mine*! My father and I are forever estranged, and he shall pay dearly for every blow he struck. How long will it take you to bring a company of cavalry to Sylvan Lake?"

"Less than forty-eight hours."

"Then fly at once and bring them. Break up the counterfeiting den, and arrest every one connected with it, and then and only then will I be ready to become your wife!"

"Honora, by the heavens, it shall be as you say! I will have the cavalry here at the earliest possible moment!"

"Good! And, remember this—there are two prisoners on the island who are doomed to death. One is an old man, who is to receive forty lashes a day until he succumbs to his horrible fate. The other is a Government detective, who is to be kept three days in chains, and then, if he refuses to join the band, he is to be buried alive!"

"Horrible! horrible!"

"Very true. I hope you will try and get back so you can rescue the detective at least, for he rescued me from drowning, and it would drive me insane were he to die so horrible a death."

"I will go at once," Roderic replied, "and you may rest assured I will make all haste possible. One kiss, and then I'm off, darling!"

The kisses were exchanged; then Roderic sprang into the saddle, put spurs to his horse, and dashed away up the valley like the wind.

Honora watched him a few minutes admiringly, then turned to return toward home, when, to her utter horror, she found herself confronted by Gilbert Golden, who seized her wrist in a grasp of iron, his eyes gleaming with a light of diabolical triumph.

"Oho! so you have another lover, have you?" he cried, leering vengefully into her face, "and you would betray your good father into the hands of his enemies, would you?"

"Release me, sir!" Honora cried, striking him in the face with her left hand. "Release me, I say!"

"Well, I guess not, my daisy. I'm going to lead you right home to your honorable sire, and have you tell him all about your pretty little scheme for revenge."

"Guess yer ain't," cried a voice. "Jes yo' take yore han's off'm dat gal, or I'll fill yo' chuck full ob lead!"

Nicodemus was around.

He had emerged from his concealment, and his rifle, cocked and ready for use, was held within a few inches of Golden's head.

The villain, half startled out of his wits, uttered an oath, and instantly let go of Honora's wrist.

"That's right," declared Nick. "Now, den, frow up bofe han's!"

With another imprecation Golden obeyed.

"Dat's c'reckt. Now, Missy Honory, jes' you paddle right along hum, fast's yer can. Don't let no berry bushes grow'n under yar feet nuther. I've got a chicking-bone ter pick wi' dis yar chap, arter yer gone!"

Only too glad, Honora hastened away, and was soon hidden from view.

CHAPTER XIV.

NICK MAKES A TEN STRIKE.

As soon as Honora was out of sight. Nicodemus turned his attention to Golden.

"Yo' ken put down yore han's, now," he said, "but mind yer don't try to run, or yer a dead man!"

"What in the devil do you mean, you infernal nigger?" fumed Golden. "Curse you, I'll make you pay dearly for this meddling!"

"No yo' won't, fo' dis yar nigger won't let yer. I se got you, Marse Howell, jes' whar I want yer, an' I se goin' to keep yer dar, 'til I gits good an' ready to let go. How much 'd yer pay for dem yar clothes?"

"What's that your infernal business?"

"Lots! I likes dem yar togs, fo' suah!"

"Oh! you do, do you? Perhaps you'd like to have a suit like 'em, you black-bided rascal!"

"Deed an' God knows I would!" grinned Nick.

And well he might.

Golden was attired in a substantial suit of expensive goods and fashionable cut. His shirt, collar, scarf, cuffs—all were of the best material, while the polished tile upon his head glistened attractively in the sunlight.

His finger-ring, a diamond scarf-pin and gold watch and chain, were things the possession of which made Nicodemus a very curious man.

"Yas, reckon I'd jes' like to hab de hull outfit," Nick confessed. "Guess dis yar nigger look like a reg'lar dude, wid dem duds on, fo' suah. No objections ter my tryin' dem on, hab yo', Mr. Howell?"

"What do you mean, you black rascal?"

"I means dat I wants ter swap togs wi' yo', so jes' you peel yourself, or I blow a hole frew yer!" cried Nick, raising the rifle to his shoulder. "Come, dar, hurry up, 'fore dis yar gun goes off an' yer a corpuss!"

"What? You cursed black dog, would you rob me of my clothing?" gasped Golden, really horrified.

"No robbery 'bout it, sah!" Nick assured, blandly. "Fair exchange no robbery, yo' know, sah. When you gib me yore wardrobe, de hull business, I gib you mine!"

"Curse upon you, I'll die first," roared Golden.

"Den die you will, sah!" Nick cried sternly. "If dis yar nigger hain't got dat hull outfit, julery an' all, inside ob five minutes, he blow yar brains out right dar where yer stand. So peel!"

Imagine the feelings of the arch villain. To part with this elegant outfit in exchange for the negro's tattered garb, was a thought so humiliating that it nearly drove him crazy.

He raved, he swore, he stamped about, but all to no use; Nicodemus kept the drop on him, unvaryingly.

Finally realizing that there was no hope, he began to part with one garment after another, and throw it on the grass, as Nicodemus directed, until, at length, he was entirely disrobed even to his shoes and stockings.

It took the negro but a moment to "shuck"

what little raiment he wore, and kicking it to Golden, he said:

"Now, jes' you take dem dar duds, and skedaddle down de valley out ob sight. Dis yar nigger don't care about makin' his toilet in de presence ob de common white trash. *Git!*"

With an oath, Golden picked up the bundle of rags, and disappeared, glad to get out of sight, to hide his mortification and to give vent to his anger.

After a good hearty laugh at the sudden change in his fortunes, Nicodemus proceeded to a safe spot to array himself in his newly acquired suit.

The clothes throughout, fitted him to a nicety. The hat was a size too small, but he could make it work.

Fortunately Golden had a large foot, and by dint of much squeezing, Nick got on the shoes and stockings, and he was fixed. In all Oregon, a more "gallus-looking" colored gent could not have been found.

Besides Golden's clothes and jewelry, on searching the pockets, Nick found himself the possessor of over a thousand dollars in bills!

"Golly! *ain't* dis yar de dandy coon, tho'? Phew! kin go back to Atlanta, now. Won't all dem common nigs stare when dey see me?" An' Susanna!—whoof! g'way! She'll be jes' tickled to deff to see me. But, I say, Nicodemus, you're a fool to stay yer'. Guess you'd better be gittin' out of *dis*. Dar may be trouble."

And shouldering his rifle, he started on up the valley, nevermore to return to the region of the Sylvan Lake.

In the meantime, down the valley, in an obscure nook, Gilbert Golden had, with unspeakable disgust, assumed the rags given him by the darky, to hide his nakedness, and a most forlorn looking mortal he was.

With neither hat nor shoes, his appearance bordered on the ludicrous, and yet, would have aroused pity in the heart of an anchorite.

Having tired of cursing and swearing, and grown sullen and revengeful, he sat upon a rock, in silence.

What in the world he was to do, was more than he could conceive.

Here he was in this unsightly masquerade, without money or friends.

To be sure, he presumed by going to Hastings Hall, he could get fitted out with some sort of a suit of clothes; but in the daytime, when, in all probability the first person he would meet, would be Honora:—that he could never endure.

He must wait until dark, before he made the venture.

Ah! a thought struck him—something that had not occurred to him, before.

"She's sent her lover, Roderic, after the cavalry. In forty-eight hours they'll be here, bu'st up the counterfeiting business, and arrest every one connected with it. If I'm here, they'll arrest me, too. But, I'm no such a fool. I won't be here!"

"Hastings has money, and a plenty of it, too, I judge. He has no safe, and must keep it in that desk of his. It will be an easy matter to open that. He sleeps in the adjoining room, to be sure, but what of that? I've had a hand in such business before and will work the racket again, I guess."

The villain grew less gloomy, as he pictured his fancied success, and his thoughts grew so animated that he almost forgot his ragged condition.

The afternoon dragged by slowly, to him, but the shadows began to lengthen, in the valley, and he set out on his way toward the farm-house.

Never having gone barefooted, since boyhood, his feet were of course very tender, and the rocks cut or bruised them at almost every step, careful as he was in his movements, and so slowly he progressed that it was well after dark ere Golden reached the vicinity of the farm-house.

The sky was overcast with clouds, and the night was very dark, so that the would-be burglar could get quite near the house without danger of being seen.

He made out that Hastings, his housekeeper, and the farm hands were seated on the piazza.

Honora was not there.

"In her room, likely," Golden commented.

"Now is my time."

All the doors and windows of the house were open, for the night was warm and sultry.

Skulking around to a side door, he gained entrance to the house, and made his way upstairs.

Sitting on the piazza, in his easy-chair, Hastings was wondering why Golden did not return, when he heard a pistol-shot within the house,

and Honora came flying out upon the piazza, a moment later.

"Papa! papa! come *quick!*" she cried. "I have shot a burglar who was trying to break into your desk. Come with a light and see who it is."

All rushed into the house, and procuring a light, went up to the library.

There, lying stretched out upon the floor, in a pool of blood, lay Gilbert Golden, rags and all.

"My God! it's Golden!" ejaculated the counterfeiter chief.

"Yes, it's Golden, and I'm done for sure, this time," was the faint reply. "The girl shot me, and she shoots mighty straight, curse her!"

"But, what are you doing here, and in all these rags?"

"The nigger robbed me of my clothes, and gave me these. I waited 'til dark, and then sneaked in here to see if I couldn't find something decent to put on, before any one saw me."

"But, Honora says you were trying to break open my desk?"

"She lies, curse her! She *lies!*"

Hastings turned to question his daughter, but, Honora had withdrawn from the room.

"Oh! she's gone!" Golden said, significantly. "She was afraid I'd give her away, and so I will!"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, when she left the house to-day, I followed her, fearing she meant suicide. She went up the valley three miles, and there was joined by a cavalry lieutenant—a lover of hers—whom she called Roderic. Ever hear of him?"

Hastings nodded, with a scowl.

"Yes; go on!" he ordered, peremptorily.

"Well," pursued Golden, his voice growing perceptibly weaker, "after they had kissed for awhile, Honora told her Roderic that you had been whipping her, and that you were a bad, unprincipled man, and counterfeiter and chief of the counterfeiters, who lived on the island, and said she wanted revenge on you, for having given her the whipping. She told about the prisoners on the island, and begged Roderic to go and fetch the cavalry, break up the counterfeiting business, and put us all under arrest. Then, and only then, said she, she would become Roderic's wife. He started off in hot haste, saying he would have the cavalry here in twenty-four hours!"

Hastings's color was deepening to an apoplectic hue.

"Golden, are you lying to me?" he hissed.

"No, I am *not*, I am dying, and you don't suppose I want a lie on my last breath, do you?"

Hastings turned to the farm-hands.

"Boys! go and find Honora!" he commanded; "search high and low for her, and don't return until you find her. Her life shall pay for this!" The men bowed, and went out.

"I'm going pretty fast!" Golden said. "The jig's up, and you'd better skedaddle, Hastings. The cavalry will surely be here, and if they ketch you, it will go hard with you."

"I know it!" was the grim reply.

Two hours later the farm-hands returned, saying they could find nothing of Honora.

CHAPTER XV.

IN DURANCE VILE.

DEADWOOD Dick's first night on the island, was unattended by any sleep. He tried hard to sleep and rest, so as to keep up his strength, but the painful activity of his mind together with the constant pacing to and fro of the sentinel, precluded the possibility of repose.

His thoughts ran to and fro between poor Job Johnson, and the mysterious Lady Sylvan.

Who was she?

Had Fred Hart told the truth about her?

Or, was she some other victim of the arch villain, Henry Hastings?

That she was in his power, there could be no doubt. That she feared him, there was equally no doubt.

It was by his authority that she had pronounced the sentences. He had told her what to say, and she dared not disobey him.

She had rushed to Dick, thrown her arms about his neck, and declared that she loved him!

All such thoughts as these filled Dick's mind. Toward morning, in the darkest hour before the dawn, the fires had all gone out, and the sentinel had ceased to pace to and fro across the glade.

Perhaps he had fallen asleep?

Then it was that Dick saw something moving

toward him—something white and ghost-like, which he could faintly discern through the dense gloom.

His heart beat faster. Was it Lady Sylvan? He almost hoped so, for, since her declaration that she loved him, a peculiar tender feeling toward her had pervaded his being.

Nearer and nearer came the white figure, until it had knelt beside him, and he knew it was indeed Lady Sylvan!

She reached forth her hand, and he clasped it in his, and thus they remained for a couple of moments, in silence.

Then, she spoke.

"I hope you are not angry with me?" she said, in a faltering tone.

"Certainly not," he replied. "Why should I be?"

"For sentencing your friends."

"It was not you who sentenced them. It was that demon Hastings, who told you what to say, and you dared not disobey him!"

"I am glad you have guessed the truth," she said, with a sigh of relief. "I did not want you to be angry with me. I did dare disobedience when it came to sentencing *you*. I am very, very sorry for your old friend."

"So am I. I expect they will use the poor old fellow up!"

"Yes, I fear so. I wish I could rescue him, and you, too, but I cannot. I have no keys."

"Sylvan, who are you? Why are you, apparently, so pure, here among these human wolves?"

She drew a long sigh, that seemed to come from the innermost depths of her heart, and remained silent.

"Tell me," Dick said, gently pressing her hand.

"I cannot!" she replied. "You must not ask me. The secret of poor Sylvan's life will never be known."

"Strange! If you were to tell me, I would be the last one to betray your confidence."

"I know it, without your telling me. I know that you are all that is good, noble, upright and honorable. Still, I cannot tell you. You must be content with the knowledge that I—I—love you."

She bent closer to him and imprinted a burning kiss upon his forehead; then, said quickly, at the same time disengaging her hand:

"There, I must be going now. Listen! The sentinel comes this way. Good-by! we may never meet again in this world."

And in a moment she was gone.

If Dick had been pining for sleep before, this little episode drove all desire for it away; so he sat up and leaned his back against the post to which his chain was fastened to think.

"Strange! strange! about that girl!" he muttered. "She's an enigma I'd give a deal to solve. Yes, to know the mystery concerning her, I'd give a day of my life, and I reckon I hain't so many left that I could spare any, either."

Directly, the sentinel came along and halted.

"Well, how you makin' it?" he asked, in not an unfriendly tone.

"As comfortable as any chained dog," Dick replied.

"Ain't used to sleeping on the ground, eh?"

"Oh, yes, I've slept on the ground many a night. Ain't used to being chained up like a wolf, though."

The sentinel laughed.

"Well, it ain't very nice, I'll admit!" he said. "I had a turn at it before I joined the gang and got the whip, besides. Cap's a hard cuss to deal with. Ever smoke?"

"Yes, occasionally."

"Well, here's my pipe an' tobacco and some matches. I know what it is to be without an occasional whiff."

Dick accepted the proffered articles with thanks, and then shouldering his gun, the sentinel tramped off.

Dick put in the rest of the time till daybreak in a good old-fashioned smoke, which made him feel immeasurably better.

When the sentinel came for his smoking materials, he said:

"If I can get into the pantry before any one's up, I'll try an' smuggle ye out a hunk o' bear-meat, providin' you can go it raw?"

"Well, I guess I can," Dick laughed. "I can eat anything from an elephant-steak to a ten-penny nail."

The guard went away, and, sure enough, in about ten minutes, returned with a luscious hunk of bear-meat.

"Get away with it now," he ordered, "fore any one ketches ye."

"You're a brick!" the prisoner complimented, and began an attack upon the meat, over which

The guard had sprinkled salt, and which was not at all unpalatable. It made a good, solid, strengthening meal.

The camp was soon astir, but beyond an occasional man, most of the gang kept to the main cabin, which was evidently where the counterfeiting was done.

After breakfast, Curly came and examined Dick's chains, and then went away.

During the forenoon, Fred Hart came sauntering leisurely along.

"Hello!" he saluted. "I see they've put you in my old parish. How do you like it? how do you feel, anyhow?"

"Just step within reach of me and I'll show you that I feel quite well!" was Dick's retort.

"Oh! no, thank you; I'm quite content to take your word for it. I hear they're going to plant you?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Why, I thought I'd just drop around and tell you, that if you grow right smart, you'll eventually grow out of the ground. It all depends on the richness of your feet when you are planted, however!"

"I'll guarantee your carcass will enrich the earth if ever I get free!" assured Dick, as Hart passed on.

About noon, poor old Job Johnson was dragged from his prison, and once more fastened to the whipping post.

His back was a terrible sight to behold, not having been washed from the previous night's torture.

The old man looked as though he had passed through months of sickness. He was haggard, and weak in the joints, and it was plainly evident to all who saw him, that, although he might live through to-day's torture, that of the morrow would be all sufficient to kill him.

He looked over at Dick with a sickly sort of smile, as he was being taken to the stake;—such a look, it was, as might come from a fearless, defiant man, who was being led to the gallows.

Tears filled Dick's eyes, and he had to clutch his hands tight together, and clench his teeth to prevent breaking down, altogether.

"I curse myself for all this!" he muttered. "If I had taken the old man's advice, and mistrusted Fred Hart, we would have been more careful, and probably avoided all this misery and suffering."

"But, wait, Henry Hastings! I yet have faith that I will escape, and, if I do, I'll hunt you to the furthest corners of the earth but what I'll have your life in payment for that of poor old Job. Before my God, I swear to this!"

Bill Bullgard did not seem in a particularly vindictive mood to-day.

Perhaps he pitied his victim—who can tell?

At any rate, he laid on the whip very lightly.

Despite this fact, each blow elicited a groan.

With the thirty-eighth blow, poor Job fainted, and Bullgard cried:

"Take him back. I'll not strike the other two blows for fifty thousand dollars!"

And so the veteran was unstrapped from the post, and dragged back into his lonely prison.

CHAPTER XVI.

DEATH OF JOB—BURIED ALIVE.

THE lashing of Old Job ended the events of importance for the remainder of that day.

The counterfeitters passed to and fro between the cabins, but none approached their prisoner at the stake.

All day long Dick watched the big cabin, in hopes of getting one glimpse of Sylvan, but he was doomed to disappointment. She did not appear at all.

When evening came again big camp-fires were built in front of each cabin, which appeared to be a usual custom.

Work was evidently over, for the men gathered in the glade or plaza, and not a few of them paused to take a look at the chained detective. Dick returned their stare complacently.

It was well on toward midnight when Hastings made his appearance on the island. His coming at so late an hour was a surprise to Deadwood Dick, and seemed equally so to the counterfeitters.

"Something's up!" Dick muttered, "or he wouldn't be over here at this late hour! I wonder what's up? I hope an attack is about to be made on the island. We'll stand a show of getting free, then!"

Hastings evidently had been drinking, for he staggered perceptibly as he crossed the plaza.

When he reached the door of the big cabin he blew a call upon a whistle, at which signal every man hurriedly entered the larger edifice.

"There's something in the wind, sure," Dick soliloquized, "and it must be that there's trouble brewing for these scoundrels. Perhaps Nicodemus has met some parties and is leading them to our rescue!"

Had he seen Nick at that moment, attired in his dude suit, and making long strides toward the bounds of civilization, he would have thought otherwise.

The Owl captain and his men remained in the big cabin for nearly an hour; then they all filed out of doors, Hastings included.

"Fetch out the prisoner!" he shouted. "We will finish that job at once. Two of you get your spades and dig a hole for the other one over there in the woods. We've no time to lose. I've got the horses all ready on the mainland, at the southern end of the lake."

Old Job was once more dragged forth from the prison cabin, more dead than alive.

"Stand him up here before me!" roared the Owl captain, and this was done. "Now, old man, the time has come for your final dose. We're about to vacate this island for a safer retreat. Will you join us or not? If not, you will be tied to that stake and flogged to death. Give us your answer, quick!"

Job shook his head firmly. "No! I won't jine ye!" he declared. "You've nigh about killed me now; it won't take much more to finish the job!"

"All right, old man. If you're hankering after grim death, you shall be accommodated!" and Hastings switched his bootlegs nervously, with the terrible whip. "Away with him, boys, to the stake. He says it won't take long to finish him, and I guess he's about right!"

Once more Old Job was pinioned to the terrible whipping-post, to undergo a torture worse than death itself.

He seemed nerved to meet this which he realized was to be his last torture on earth.

When he was fastened to the post, Hastings called to Bullgard, who hung aloof.

"Here, you Bill! take the whip, and don't stop, until you've finished the Job you've so nobly begun!"

Bullgard shook his head.

"No! boss, I can't do it!" he said. "I've struck the old man the last blow I'll ever strike him, and I'm heartily ashamed I ever struck him, at all!"

"What! you dare to disobey my orders?" and the Owl captain drew a revolver.

"Yes, I dare disobey your orders!" was the dogged reply. "Shoot me if it will give you any satisfaction, but I wouldn't strike the old man again for the best fifty-thousand dollars in the land!"

"Then take the penalty of disobedience!" snarled the captain, and leveling his six-shooter, he fired—once! twice! thrice!

With a groan Bill Bullgard fell to the ground, wounded to the death.

"Serves him right!" commented Hastings. "He would have betrayed us, sure. Now I suppose I'll have to finish the job, for finished it shall be, before I leave this island."

He took a pocket-flask of liquor from his pocket, and indulged in a deep drink, after which he picked up the whip and proceeded to the horrible act of slow murder, striking with all his might, as if he would cut the bleeding body in twain. Old Job fainted, after the fourth blow, but the inhuman fiend at the whip continued the castigation, until the fortieth blow was struck, when even his own men interfered.

"Let up, capt'in!" they said. "The old man's dead, long ago!"

Hastings threw down the whip.

"Well, I'm glad it is over. He's got his deserts. Now for the other!" and he strode over to where Deadwood Dick was standing, with pallid face and gleaming eyes, his hands clinched until his nails nearly entered the flesh.

"Well, young man, your partner is dead!" Hastings announced, with diabolical coolness.

"Yes! and for every pain he suffered, you fiend!" cried Dick, fiercely, "I'll yet make you suffer a thousand agonies!"

"Oh! you will, eh? Ha! ha! I fancy after you're buried alive, you will hardly do any one any harm. Have you concluded to join us, yet?"

"No! nor never will!" Dick returned. "I will never join you, you human hyena!"

"Then into the ground you go! We are going to vacate this place for a more secure retreat in the mountains. When we are gone, your head will be left sticking out of the ground, and will

make a capital lunch for the first wild animal that comes along. Better reconsider your decision and become one of us. I'll make you my lieutenant in command."

"Your lieutenant?" the undaunted prisoner retorted. "I'd quicker blow out my brains than become the colleague of a monster like you!"

"Well, then, your doom is sealed. Boys, seize and bind him!"

A rush was made. Dick was overpowered and bound, and, by Hastings's orders, was then dragged to the spot where he was to be buried.

The hole had already been finished, and without delay Dick was dropped into it in a standing position.

His chin just reached the level of the ground. Two men then shoveled in the dirt around him, until he was in truth buried alive.

"There! I reckon you'll grow!" the Owl captain cried, when the job was complete. "There is not the least probability that, after we are gone, your most pious thoughts will be disturbed, except by some beast or bird of the forest, who may wander along. So now, Mr. Bristol, a long, last, sad farewell. I'd really like to shake hands with you, but I see you are too indisposed for that operation. Ha, ha, ha! Some day I may return to this island, and I shall expect to find that you've grown up and blossomed out as a daisy!"

Then the wretch turned and strode away, followed by his men, their torches flaring weirdly as they disappeared among the trees.

Dick was left alone!

Alone among the grim, gaunt trees—alone in the darkness, deep and solemn—alone, a prisoner of the earth, with no prospect or hope of rescue.

It was a bitter thought to contend with—bitter indeed—but, true heart that he was, he bore up bravely.

After the outlaws were gone, he began to consider the question of his probable length of life. Would he suffer long, and literally die by slow degrees? Would some fierce wild beast end his misery?

In the midst of these harrowing thoughts, his quick hearing detected a footstep.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

IN a moment a woman came and knelt by Dick's protruding head.

The darkness was so intense that he could not see her distinctly, but as soon as she laid her soft hand upon his head, and gently smoothed his hair, he knew who it was.

"Is it you, Sylvan?"

"Yes, Mr. Bristol. I have come, at great risk, to say good-by. We are going away."

"Yes, I know. Where?"

"I do not know—cannot even guess. Oh! Mr. Bristol, you can never, never know how much it pains me to know that I must go away, and leave you in this awful situation. But, as God is my judge, I am powerless to aid you. Even now, no doubt, they are looking for me!"

"I know, Sylvan, you can do nothing for me. I suppose I shall have to die here by degrees. I hate to part with you, Sylvan, but I suppose it must be."

"Yes, so far as the present is concerned. But, in all probability we shall meet again, some time in the dim future, and if such should be our lot, I will then tell you the secret of my life."

"But, we will never meet again in this life, Sylvan!"

"Yes, I think we will. Were you to get free, I believe it is your intention to hunt down Henry Hastings to justice!"

"No! not to justice, as the word generally implies, but to death. Were I to get free, I would begin a death-hunt, that would not end this side of the furthest corner of the earth, but what I'd find and kill him!"

"Very good. Then it is probable that you and I, who have been thrown together under such singular circumstances, will meet again. At least, I hope so."

"I hope we may meet again under different circumstances, but it's hoping against hope. I will never be rescued. I am even now in my tomb!"

"You will be rescued, and that, too, before we are many hours away!"

"I do not understand."

"You have seen Honora?"

"Yes."

"Well, she has betrayed her father."

"Betrayed her father?"

"Yes. That is why we are leaving the island."

"Pray explain."

"I have but a few minutes left, but will explain as far I can. Honora's father really whipped her because she refused to marry Gilbert Golden. Out of revenge, she sought her lover, a cavalry lieutenant, and gave the whole business away concerning the counterfeiting den and the prisoners on this island. Her lover started at once for the cavalry, promising to be back in forty-eight hours."

"So you see you will be free much sooner than you anticipated. I must be going now, or they will miss me. While I cannot—dare not—keep you informed of our whereabouts, I have faith in your detective skill, and believe that you will eventually find us. Good-by, Mr. Bristol."

"Good-by, Sylvan."

They exchanged several passionate kisses, and then Sylvan arose, and with a last good-by, hurried away.

Once more Deadwood Dick was left alone, but this time it was not with such a sense of loneliness and despair as had assailed him before.

Now the near future promised him the blessing of a rescue from his uncomfortable position.

He was not a dozen yards from the glade, and if the soldiers came, he knew he could make them hear him.

Even now, from his position, he could catch an occasional glimpse of the outlaws' preparations for departure. Everything was bustling about the camp.

By and by it began to grow lighter and lighter, and the odor of burning timber assailed his nostrils.

"Ha! they're all ready to start," he mused, "and have fired the cabins to destroy the evidences of their nefarious business."

And he was right. Every cabin had been fired, and as the logs of which they were constructed were dry, the fire made rapid headway, and the conflagration sent out a vivid glare, that lit up the heavens for miles around.

Suddenly, while watching the fire through the openings between the trees, Dick saw a man close at hand on the right.

It was Fred Hart.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Dick.

"Sh! they don't know I am here," Hart replied, coming nearer. "I have come on the sly."

"Well, what have you come for?"

"To see if you don't want to get out of that predicament!"

"It is but natural that I should. Why do you ask?"

"Do you want to make terms for your release?"

"How do you mean?"

"Would you be willing to pay a sum of money I were to dig you out and set you at liberty?"

"I haven't any money. They took it all away from me, when I was captured."

"But you have money laid by, I presume, somewhere around the country."

"Your presumption will carry you off, one of these days!"

"Oh! I guess not. Let's have your answer. I have no time to tarry here, unless there's some money in it!"

"How much would you expect to get for releasing me?"

"Five thousand dollars!"

"Phew! nothing less?"

"Not a dollar less!"

"Well, then you'd better trot right along, sonny, and join your caravan of wolves. You'll wait until hair grows on your teeth before you get five thousand dollars out of me!"

"Well, now, look here. If you mean business, maybe I might come down a little. What'll you give?"

"Not a dollar!"

"You don't mean it?"

"You bet I do. All I would do, were you to release me, would be to kick you off the island."

"Humph! evidently you are not particular about getting free!"

"Not enough so to pay you for it, you detestable traitor!"

Hart uttered an impatient oath, and turning, hurried away.

Within half an hour the place was wrapt in silence, except for the crackling of the flames that were eating up the cabins in the glade.

The counterfeiters had taken their final departure.

Six hours later, Lieutenant Roderic M. and part of a company of cavalry, arrived at the Hastings farm-house, but found it deserted.

The only thing of any account they did find, except the furniture, was the lifeless body of Gilbert Golden.

Constructing a raft, they crossed to the island, only to find the cabins a heap of ruins, and their prey flown.

Very much disappointed, they were about to leave, when their attention was attracted by the cries of Deadwood Dick.

It was an easy matter to find him, and in a few minutes he was dug out of his living tomb, and stood once more beneath heaven's radiant dome, a free man.

It proved that he and the lieutenant had met before, up in Dakota, and they at once became friends.

Lieutenant Mann expressed much concern over not being able to find Honora, but, on being assured that it was highly probable she had not gone with her father, the officer concluded she had started for the fort.

The mutilated body of poor old Job was buried on the island; and then, when the cavalry was ready to depart, and urged Dick to accompany them he shook his head, and said:

"No! no! I have a mission of vengeance to perform—a death-hunt to pursue; and my trail begins here!"

So, then and there they separated.

THE END.

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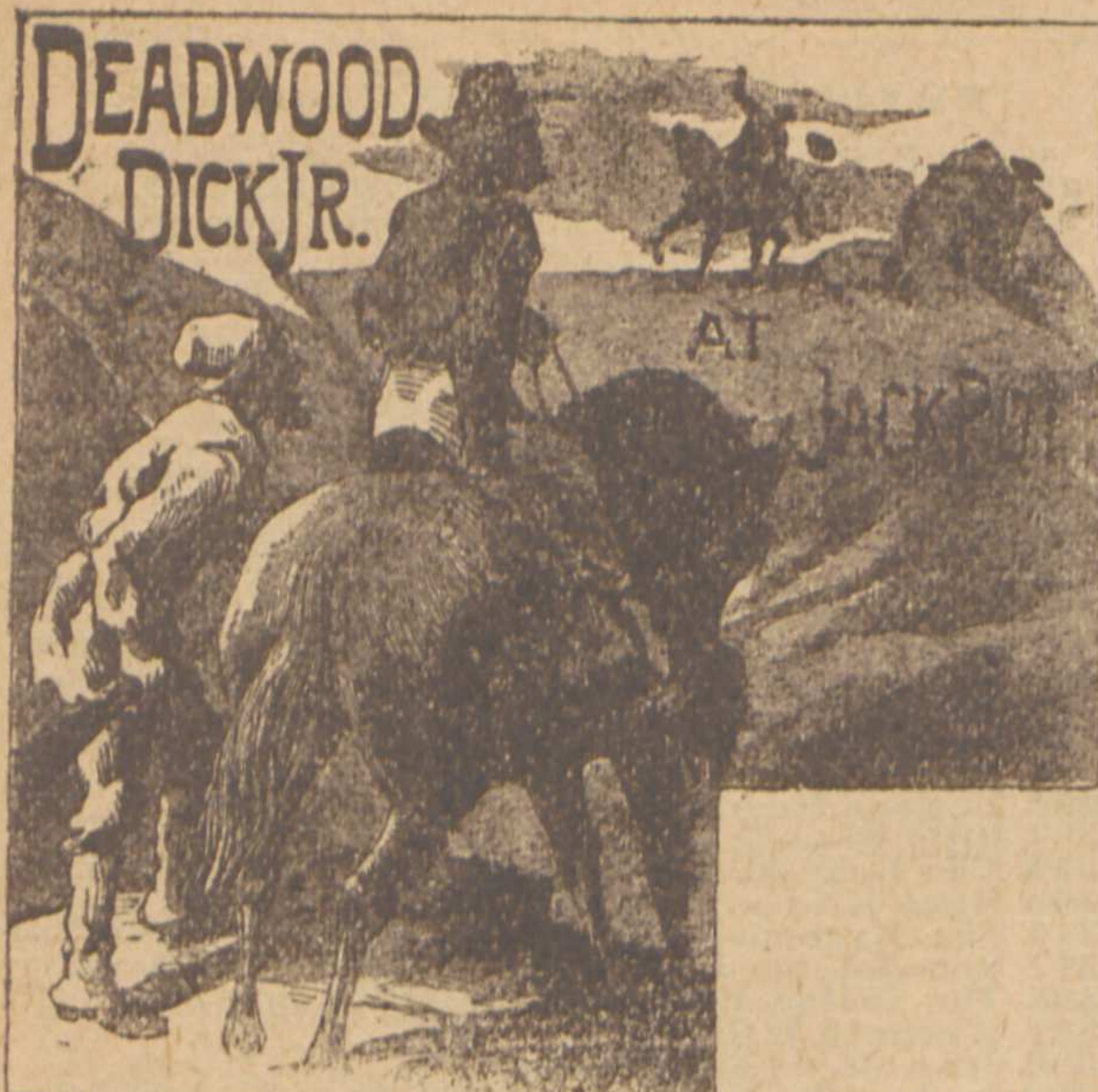
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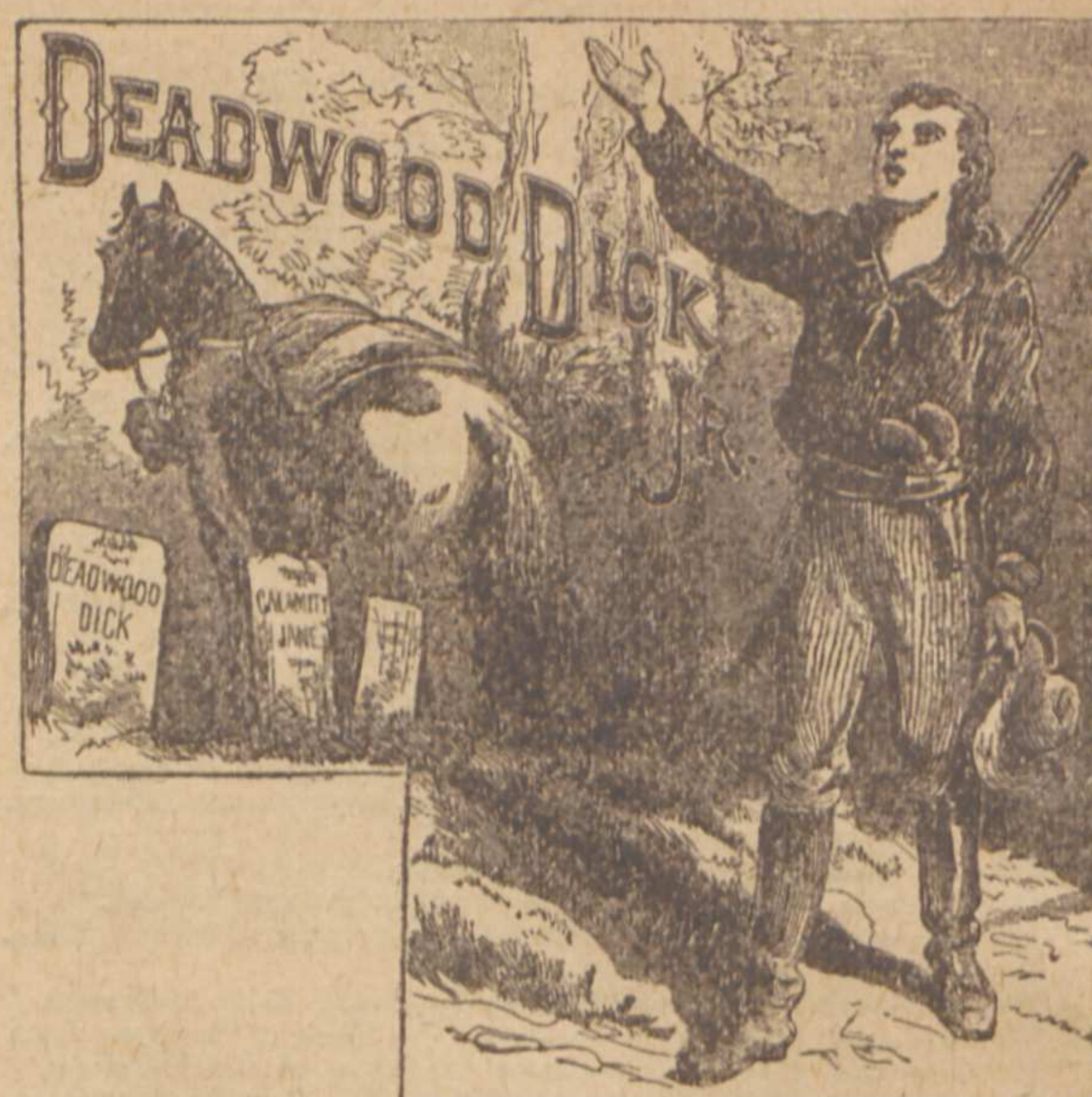
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